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Mario Montanari

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The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

GENERAL STAFF OF THE ARMY
HISTORICAL OFFICE

Mario MONTANARI

THE ITALY ARMY
IN THE
CAMPAIGN OF GREECE

3RD EDITION

ROME 1999

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

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The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

PRESENTATION
2nd edition

Out of print for a long time the 1st edition of "The campaign of Greece", is intentional to give run to a reprint, bringing some modification to the publication begin in order to reduce the total size to a single volume.

The Author has, therefore, looked again and lightened the text, from particular essentially concerning local episodes from aspects less meaningful, and merely technical issues.

As far as the appendixes, their number has been reduced to least, holding account of the fact that the excerpts of greater importance of documents brought back in the 1st edition, find in kind, cited in the text and that the future publication of the "Reports of the meetings held by the General head of the G.S." and of the "Per diem historian of the High supreme command" for the period of 11 June 1940 - 30 April 1941 he renders superfluous a repetition.

THE HEAD OF THE HISTORIAL OFFICE

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

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The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

PRESENTATION
1st edition

This is the narration of the campaign of Greece, one of the sadder pages of our military history. A lot already has been written in purpose: sometimes with the passion of who had passed through that painful experience, others with the vein controversy of who is incline to comprise all and all in one negative vision, perhaps in part preconceived. Above every sterile recrimination, has been attempted to consider the six months of fighting in Albanian on land with a critical separation - than it does not mean in some way to diminish the severity of the total judgment - such to prevent hurried deductions founded on the single episode and to gain an objective interpretation, holding debit account of the age, the atmosphere and the contingent vicissitudes.

The examination of these past factors to turn out, in sure way, that the errors that more heavy have conditioned the course of the campaign they derive from the inadequate political preparation, of which that soldier was consequence directed.

The Italian troops of Albania were found to operate in difficult conditions. Inadequately and hastily trained, badly equipped, had first of all to exceed the violent disappointment to overseas state advanced to their forces an enterprise that, with superficiality unforgivable, it had seem as simple and sure; to reject then with thousands in retreat the enemy rendered dared from the unexpected success is achieved; to exceed finally the hostility of a natural atmosphere and the sourness of meteorological conditions to which absolutely they were not prepared. The all in one war not understood and not felt.

Lavished that although they in the fight all their energies and paid a highest price of blood and suffering always completing, with dignity and spirit of sacrifice, theirs the duty of soldiers.

THE HEAD OF THE HISTORICAL OFFICE

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Translators notes:

I would like to take a moment to clarify this work. I do not claim authorship and this is a translation done with software designed for that task, while I did proof read through the work, something's remained unclear. The software chooses the most common usage for a word, while the author may have meant something else. This work was written for a college level reading skills, plus there are often cultural references or idems which I often miss. Also the original printed text is full of spelling mistakes, likely due to poor proof reading of the original work or where the printer dropped or added a letter. As well as my difficulty with Italian word endings which in Italian indicate who's taking actions or a about who the action refers. I think I compensated well, but it was a learning experience, so I got better as the work progressed. Or I hope so.

The Greek Campaign was the second work I translated and unlike Volume 1 of Operations in North Africa survived intact the changes in file formatting. It is presented here as I originally translated it. This work was done in 2006 to 2007 and represents my level of learning at the time. I would like to return to it and redo all the work, but that will have to wait until the overall project of the Office History of the Italian Army in world War Two is completed.

I have retained the Italian command titles, for example using Comando Supremo instead of Supreme Command. All the powers had their own supreme commands so it was easier to identify which supreme command is being referred to when its in that countries language, besides it meaning obvious. Below the Supreme Command there were various high commands or Comando Superior. These were the supreme regional command, and I used the Italian language version. Also please remember the Italian Armed Forces at this time are also "Royal" forces. So the "R" before the command symbolizes this. To be clear R. Esercito (Royal Army), R. Aeronautica (Royal Air Force), R. Marina (Royal Navy). So I used the Italian form so not to confuse them with their British counterparts.

I also retained the Italian forms of place names. Since I used the drawing from the books, I needed to retain the names used in the text for clarity. This applies mostly to town names, while countries, islands and famous locations used common English, hoping that same notoriety would impart clarity.

The purpose of this project was and is to understand went wrong. For some decades I dismissed the poor performance of the Italian armed forces simplistically due to them being "Italian". All the works I read on the Second World War were in English and presented their biases of the authors about the Italian Armed Forces. Most were concerned with actions of the Germans or the British Empire, and the British Official History and other British authors of the time really did not treat Italy fairly. Germany was the real threat, due to the impotence of the Italian war effort. Not that they were wrong, and the rampaging monster in Europe was Germany. Which brings me back to Italy, why was Italy so impotent? The Italians are a brave and self-sacrificing as anyone else, their Armed Forces are just as professional as anyone else, so why was Italy so poorly prepared and equipped for the war? In these works, I find the final chapter "Conclusive Considerations" to be most in lighting. This volumes more so then the others in this series since in deals with the Division Binary. This formation was one of the signature

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

formations of this era. While it is what today would be called a "Mixed Brigade", it was treated in practice as a Trinary Division. Its shortcomings apparent to all professionals remained uncorrected. Italian industry was incapable in wartime to adequately support the army, much less upgrade it. And the highest political offices, behaved erratically and sometime delusionally. Nothing seemed to break the Duce's illusions until some disaster over took the armed forces. While this campaign was a "Win", its effects will last the entire war, straining Italian resources without an offsetting gain.

I would recommend the following for additional understanding.

John Gooch's "Mussolini and his Generals" Cambridge University Press 20007 answered many questions, especially the last three chapters. In summary, Italy's unpreparedness was known to Mussolini and due to his greediness he jumps into a war unready because in that moment the war seemed won.

John Joseph Timothy Sweet's "Iron Arm", Greenwood Press, London England 1980 & by attribution Sheppard B. Clough's "The Economic History of Modern Italy", New York, Columbia University Press 1964. Both go into the background of Italy and bring context to the state of the country. The author of the History of Operations did not spend time with background information. Honesty, it was beyond the scope of his work, but his work is out of context otherwise.

Robert M Denny Jr.
August 2015

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

List of common abbreviations used in the Text.

A/A = Anti Aircraft or Anti Aircraft Artillery
 A.S. = Italian for N.A. or North Africa
 A.O.I = Italian East Africa or I.E.A.
 Arm. Div. = Armored Division
 BOC = (unknown but similar to unfoc)
 Btr = Battery
 Btg = Battalion, or Bn
 Bty = Battery
 Cav. Bde. = Cavalry Brigade
 CC.NN. = Camicie Nere or Black Shirts or Milita
 Co. or Coy. = Company
 Corp = Army Corp (2 or more Divisions)
 CC.RR = Royal Carabinieri
 C.S.F.A. = Comando Superiore Armed Forces
 C.S.F.A.A.S. = Comando Superiore Armed Forces North Africa
 DAK = Deutches Afrika Corp
 GG.FF or *Giovani Fascisti* or Young Fascist
 G .B = Great Britain
 Gen. = General
 Gen. Ismay, the Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defense
 G S. = General Staff
 I.G.S.G = Imperial General Staff General or Imperial Joint Chiefs of Staff (UK)
 Inf. = Infantry
 Inf. Div. = Infantry Division (In Italian its D.f.)
 Intendenza = or Stewardship is the Italian Army's equivalent to the Quartermaster Corp.,
 but it has some extra duties which are not relevant here.
 Lt. = Light
 Lt. Cav. Div. = Light Cavalry Division
 Lieut. Gen. = Lieutenant General
 MG. = Machinegun
 Mot. Bn. = Motorized Battalion
 N.A. =North Africa
 R.A.F. = Royal Air Force
 Recon = Reconnaissance
 Regt = Regiment
 S.I.M, = Italian Army Intelligence Service
 S.M. = Italian for General Staff
 S.M.R.E. = Italian for General Staff Royal Army
 Unfoc = Unit of Fire = or a normal amount of ammunition for that unit
 U .S.S.R. = Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or what Russia was called under the
 Rule of the Communist Party

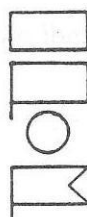
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

CONVENTIONAL SYMBOLS used in the sketches

We used unit symbols currently in use by the Italian Army

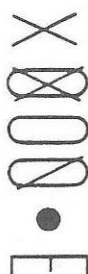
1. *Base Symbol*

Unit
Headquarters
Logistical Installation
Logistical Headquarters



2. *Arms Symbols*

Infantry
Mechanized Infantry
Armored
Armored Cavalry
Artillery
Engineers



3. *Range of Symbols*

Army	XXXX	Regiment	III
Army Corp.	XXX	Battalion - Group	II
Division	XX	Company - Battery	I
Brigade	X		

To indicate a complex tactical usage of the symbols, above the symbol of rank


The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

8

4. Indication of Nationality:

Where necessary, to the right of the symbol are used the abbreviations IT: Italy, Ge: Germany; UK: United Kingdom; AU: Australia; NZ: New Zealand; FR: France; Po: Poland

Es.:  5 Indicated II Bn. of the 5th Inf. Reg.

5. Enemy elements:

To represent commands or enemy units, the basic symbols are double-lined.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

GENERAL INDEX

Presentation 2 nd Edition	Page 3
Presentation 1 st Edition	" 5
conventional Signs	" 7
 CAP. I – Premonitory symptoms of the conflict	 " 9
1. Italian-Greeks relationships after the occupation of Albania	" 9
2. Italian military politics from 1939 to 1940	" 17
3. Origins of the conflict	" 21
4. Oscillations of the understandings operated towards Balcania	"35
 CAP II - October 1940	 " 53
1. The disarrangement of the army	"53
2. The meeting of 15 October	" 60
3. Towards war	"73
 CAP III – The theater of operations	 " 85
1. Boundries and organization	" 85
2. The ways of communication	" 86
3. Operating possibilities	"90
 CAP IV - Italian operations plan	 " 97
1. Guzzoni-Pariani plan	"97
2. The Geloso plan	"103
3. The plan for Contingency G.	"106
4. The definitive plan	" 113
5. The alignment on 28 October	"120

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

CAP. V - The Greek operations plan	Page 131
1. The Greek Armed Forces	"131
2. Plan IB	" 136
3. Plan IBa	"141
4. The alignment on 28 October	" 152
 CAP VI - The Italian offensive (28 October -9 November)	 "157
1. The offensive in the Epirus sector	" 157
2. The <i>Julia</i> on the Pindo	" 171
3. Operations in the sector of the XXVI Corps	" 183
4. Repercussions of the failure of offensive	"191
5. The first period of campaign	" 208
 CAP VII - The Greek counter-offensive (10 November -3 December)	 "219
1. The first directive of Gen. Soddu	"219
2. Greek counteroffensive plan	" 219
3. The battle for Korça	"236
4. The withdraw of the 9 th Army	" 251
5. Combat on the Epirus frontier	" 269
6. The withdraw of the 11 th Army	" 287
7. Mussolini - Badoglio crisis	"307
 CAP VIII - The battle of arrest (4-31 December)	 " 329
1. The events from the 4 to 8 December	"329
2. The operations in the sector of the 9 th Army	" 338
3. The operations between Tomori and the Strakavec (11 th Army).	" 354
4. The operations between the Strakavec and sea (11 th Army)	" 374
5. The Greek offensive with year-end on the front of the 11 th Army	" 395
6. The assumption of command with Gen. Cavallero	"412
 CAP. IX - The Battle of Berat (January 1941)	 "433
1. The strategic problem in January 1941	" 433
2. The Greek offensive on Berat	"441
3. The control on the Berat sector	" 462
4. Counter maneuver of Klisura	"478
5. The defense of the coastal sector	" 493
6. Reflection of the operations in Albania in political-military area	"503
 CAP X - The battle of Tepeleni (February-March 1941)	 " 521
1. The rearrangement of the 11 th Army	"521
2. The fight for Tepeleni	" 537
3. The last Greek effort	" 558
4. Reflection in political-military field	" 569

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

CAP. XI - The Italian offensive in Deshnices valley (March 1941)	Page 585
1. Preparation	" 585
2. Attack	" 608
3. The pause after the offensive	" 628
4. The winter operations in the sector of the 9 th Army	" 648
 CAP XII - The operations on Albanian-Yugoslavian front	" 667
1. The review of plans	" 667
2. The defensive phase in the sector of the XVII Corps	" 682
3. The offensive phase to the eastern frontier	" 696
 CAP XIII - The battle of Epirus	" 709
1. The political-military situation in April 1941	" 709
2. The operations in the sector of the 9 th Army	" 721
3. The operations in the sector of the 11 th Army	" 739
4. The employment of the Artillery of the engineers	" 749
5. The end of the war	" 754
 CAP XIV – Conclusive considerations	" 771
1. The action of command	" 771
2. The binary division	" 779
3. The efficiency of the G.U. mobilization	" 788
4. The cost of war	" 800
5. The judicial activities	" 806
 Appendixes	" 813
Bibliography	" 849
Index of sketches	" 853
Index of the cited names in the text	" 857
Index of the main topographic features cited in the text	" 858
Index of the commands and major units	" 859

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

INDEXES

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

852
Blank

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

INDEX OF THE SKETCHES

1 The deployment of the Italian G.U. in May 1940	Page 25
2 The Italian alignment 1.10.1940	"51
3 The street situation of the theater on 28.10.1940	" 87
4 The direction of operations from Albania to Greece	"91
5 The direction of operations from Greece to Albania	" 93
6 Defensive Lines against the direction of operations of the Skumbini	"95
7 Defensive Lines against the direction of operations of Vojussa	" 96
8 The plan of Guzzoni-Pariani (1939)	"99
9 The plan Geloso (August 1940)	" 105
10 The plan for the Contingency G of S.M.R.E. (Sept.. 1940)	"107
11 The plan Visconti Prasca (September 1940)	" 109
12 The operating task of the <i>Ciamuria</i> army corps	"123
13 The task of the <i>Julia</i> alp. Div.	"124
14 The operating task of the <i>Litorale</i> grouping	" 125
15 Articulation of command in Albania 28.10.1940	" 127.
16 Deployment in peace time of the Greek army in 1939	"133
17 Plan IB	"140
18 flat IBa	"142
19 The IBa line and the alternatives positions T2, T3 and T4	" 149
20 Greek defensive lines	"153
21 The ordering for the attack to the road node of Kalibaki	" 158
22 The forcing of the Kalamas from part of the <i>Siena</i> Inf. Div.	"164
23 The design of attack of 5 November at Kalibaki	" 166
24 The offensive on the lower Kalamas (5-9 November)	" 167
25 The operations on the Pindo from the 28 to 31 October	" 174
26 The operations on the Pindo from the 10 to 3 November	"177
27 The operations on the 4 to 9 November	"180
28 The operations of the <i>Julia</i> alp. Div. from 28 October to 10 November	"184
29 The front of Bilishti on 28 October	" 185
30 The situation in the Korçano on 6 November	"190
31 The situation in the field of the 11 th Army 10 November	" 220

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

32 The alignment of the XXVI Army Corps on 12 November	Page 224
33 The Greek operating design in W. Macedonian	"232
34 The Greek attack to the Morova (14-17 November)	" 237
35 The situation in the Korçano 18 November	"243
36 The intermingling with the units in the 9 th Army (19 November)	"247
37 The withdraw with the troops with the 9 th Army (21-23 November)	"252
38 The Greek attack to the southern flank of the 9 th Army (19-21 November)	" 256
39 The alignment of the 9 th Army 25 to November	"259
40 The front with Pogradec (27-30 November)	" 263
41 The situation of the 9 th Army on 30 November	"266
42 The situation of the III Army Corps on 3 December.	" 268
43 The alignment with the <i>Ciamuria</i> Army Corps on 14 November	"271
44 The alignment with the 11 th Army on 14 November	" 273
45 The operating perspectives with the 11 th Army on 17 November	"276
46 The alignment with the VIII Army Corps on 17 November	" 278
47 The passage between the 9 th Army and the 11 th Army in the high valleys of the Osum 22 November	"284
48 The alignment of XXV the Army Corps on 17 November	" 285
49 The beginning with the withdraw of the VIII Army Corps and the Greek attack (21 – 22 November)	“288
50 The situation of the 11 th Army in withdraw at 12:00 of 22 November	"289
51 The situation to north of the Vojussa on 26 November.	" 293
52 The situation at the Epirus frontier 26 November.	"295
53 The Suhes-Zagorias furrow and Greek operating possibilities	" 298
54 The 11 th Army withdraw of the from the 24 to 30 November	"305
55 The counterpoising forces 18 November	" 312
56 The logistic alignment on 10 December	" 334
57 The operations on the front of the 9 th Army from the 1 to 4 December	" 339
58 The alignment with the III Army Corps on 1 December	"342
59 The front with the Devoli (5-9 December).	" 344
60 The operations of the 9 th Army from the 9 to 17 December	" 347
61 The alignment with the XXVI Army Corps 19 December	"351

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

62 The Albania south-western and the Greek operating possibilities	Page 356
63 Contraposition alignments in the field of the 11 th Army on 8 Decembers	" 360
64 The sector of the VIII Army Corps (7 December)	" 362
65 The Osum and Ambum sector (11-15 December)	" 368
66 The Vojussa and Zagorias sector (5-20 December)	" 371
67 The alignment with the XXV army corps (10-15 December)	" 379
68 The operating design with the Greek army corps (15 Decembers)	" 388
69 The sector with the Litorale (15-20 December)	" 391
70 The operating design with the Greek offensive of the yearend	" 399
71 The sector of the Kurvalesh (25-31 dicembre)	" 403
72 The situation of the <i>Modena</i> division on 31 December.	" 406
73 The Vojussa sector on 31 December	" 413
74 The Greek alignment on 6 January 1941	" 443
75 The Greek attack to Mali Qarishta (8-9 January)	" 448
76 The situation on the front of Berat after the fall of Klisura (14 January)	" 457
77 The situation between Osum and Vojussa 14 January	" 459
78 The morphologic Outline of the Deshnicës valley	" 464
79 The alignment of the IV and VIII army corps on 21 January	" 465
80 The alignment with the VIII and XXV army corps on 21 January	" 467
81 The alignment with the IV army corps on 31 January	" 471
82 The alignment with the VIII army corps on 31 January	" 473
83 The situation of the sector of the XXV army corps 10 January	" 480
84 The situation with the left wing of the XXV army corps on 21 January	" 484
85 Outline with counter-maneuver of Klisura	" 486
86 The maneuver design with the special army corps (January 1941)	" 496
87 The alignment with the XXV army corps on 10 February	" 532
88 The orohydrography outline with the main zone with the battle with Tepeleni	" 539
89 The Greek operating design for the conquest of Valona	" 541
90 The attack with the Greek 5 th Inf. Div. to the Shendeli (13 February)	" 543
91 The attack with the Greek 2 nd Inf. Div. in Zagorias valley and on Golico (15 February)	" 546

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

92 The situation in the sector of Tepeleni 25 February.	Page 557
93 The resumption of the Greek offensive on Tepeleni (7-12 March)	"561
94 The first operating plan of Gen. Gambarà (20 February)	"591
95 The plan based on the directives n. 18 (28 February)	"596
96 The situation of the IV Army Corps 7 March	" 610
97 The situation with the XXV Army Corps to the north with the Vojska on 7 March	"612
98 The situation with the VIII Army Corps on 7 March	" 614
99 The situation with the XXV Army Corps on 16 March	"633
100 The situation with the III Army Corps to mid January	" 650
101 The sector with Tomorreces valley at the end of January	"655
102 Plan of the operation "Chiesto"	" 661
103 The plan of offensive for the 9 th Army based on the talk Cavallero-Pirzio Biroli of 26 March	"664
104 Albanian Defensive Organization previewed for 1934	"668
105 Alignment previewed from the P.R. (12 May 1941)	"671
106 The alignment of the XVII Army Corps the 8 April	" 692
107 Situation in the Scutarino on 13 April	" 694
108 The sector of the XIV Corps on 5 April	" 697
109 The advance on Dibra (9-12 April)	" 703
110 The enemy alignments in Balcania on 6 April	" 713
111 The Anglo-Greek alignment on the P.D. of the Aliakmon	" 714
112 German offensive in Macedonian and the Greek defensive line	" 716
113 The situation in the sector of the Korçano on 3 April	" 723
114 The situation in the sector of Korçano on 11 April	" 728
115 Hypotheses on the Greek defensives intentions	" 731
116 The operations of the 9 th Army from 13 to 15 April	"733
117 The situation of the 9 th Army on 23 April	" 736
118 The operations of the 9 th Army from 7 to 23 April	"737

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Chapter I

THE PREMONITORY SYMPTOMS OF THE CONFLICT

1. ITALO-GREEK RELATIONSHIPS AFTER THE OCCUPATION OF ALBANIA.

Reasons of friction between Italy and Greece they had been several from the time of the Balkan wars and also after the composition of the episode of greater gravity - the murder of the Gen. Tellini and consequent our action against Corfù - a sure degree of hostility remained latent in the Greeks. The same stipulation of the treaty of friendship, conciliation and judicial regulations (Rome, 1928) of decennial duration, did not greatly modify the situation; in fact it is in occasion of the endorsements decided from the National Society in action against us, during the Spanish civil war, Greece was found openly on the other side of the barricade. Something changed in this attitude after our Victory in Ethiopia and the affirmation of Franco; a sure appreciation of our power remaining an aversion and one of deep distrust, and the dictatorial regimen also emerged in the 1936 from Gen. Metaxas had with Rome correct relationships if not just cordial. The occupation of Albania provoked in the Greek world an enormous fuss. They were it emerged, a true, signs official or unofficial premonitory to spite of the refutation of the Italian government but the disembarkation of the expeditionary corps alarmed in an unexpected way the Greek public opinion to the point to push it to ask itself anxiously if the Italian troops would not have continued the advance beyond the Albanian border and/or occupied Corfù.

The same Greek General Staff was strongly alarmed, probably also and above all because of news, rather fanciful, taken for valid without a lot to inquire on their reliability. As an example, it very thought that they were invaded since from 7 April, in Albania two army corps, and since "*the Italians, disembarked not named (...)* began

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to push their forces towards the Greek borders ", the commanders of the 8th division (Gen. Katsimitros) and of the 9th division (Gen. Papanikolaos), dislocated respective in Epiro and the western Macedonian, will receive order to courageous defend the national territory" in case of invasion of the Italian army ", and were authorized to proclaim, in such eventuality, the mobilization in the jurisdiction zone, also scrupulously avoiding any provocation or reason of friction. The 9th, after a communication from the Greek ambassador to Rome, the General Staff ordered precautionary measures to the commander of the garrison of Corfù: "Information report that the Italian army will try a invasion and the consequent occupation of Coifù between the tenth and the twelfth current stop (...),I make known that the capitulation or yield will be considered high treason stop (...)"⁽¹⁾.

The government of Athens, instead, reacted with much calm - in spite of the unexpected arrival of King Zog with a small following - without to yield to the pressures of the General Staff to assume open defensive measures immediately, and was endured relieved from two communications, one coming from London and other from Rome. From London, on 9 April they telegraphed the minister of Greece Simopoulos:

"The Foreign minister has said that the Italian person in charge of transactions has made his visit yesterday evening to me and he has declared from part of Mussolini that Italy not feed any hostile intention in the comparisons of Greece and Yugoslavia, where, however, it has not been manifested some restlessness, has not spoken about Corfù and the attributed intention to England to occupy that island, that that could create complications.

Lord Halifax has answered that similar behavior is not in the habits of the English; rather, he held us to declare that if the Italians occupied Corfù the British Government would consider it as serious the thing (*with a grave view*)".⁽²⁾

From Rome, the day after, arrived a oral communication of Mussolini, through our Person in charge of transactions:

"Whichever voice can be or can run in merit to a expected Italian action against Greece is false. It cannot be diffused that from provocative agents. Fascist Italy confirmation to be its intention to respect in the more absolute way territorial integrity and insular of Greece. Fascist Italy wants to always maintain and to develop more the cordial relations than

(1) S.ME, Greek *The Greek-Italian war*, vol. 1 *The Causes and reasons of the Italian-Greek war* . para 20

(2) R. Foreign Minister of Greece, *The aggression of Italy against Greece* (white book)

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

friendship that joins the two countries. It is disposed to supply concrete tests of such will
 "(3)

On 13 April, Chamberlain to the Commons, Halifax to the House of Lords and Daladier to the French press declared that Great Britain and France would not have accepted changes in the Balkan situation, and that, if Greece or Rumania had been forced to defend themselves with arms against an attack to their independence, they would have lend every aid to them to be able. This guarantee - demanded or provoked from the Greece, or spontaneous that was - was, as was seen, absolutely generic, but there was not for misunderstood on the reference: it could not regard that Italy or Bulgaria and, as is natural, much more probably before. Equally obviously it was received with evident bad mood in the Italian political atmosphere. The tranquility, is pure appearing, did not last however to long. Because of uncontrolled and alarming, coming from voices also from Tirana, the fear of a possible Italian attack from Albania is diffused newly. To keep in mind who the force of ours five divisions was estimated, in Athens 31 battalions infantry, 6 battalions bersaglieres, 1 machine-gun battalion, 1 motorized battalion, 9 regiments tanks etc. Consequently, obtained the approval of the Government, in the night on 23 August the Greek General Staff ordered the mobilization of some categories of reservists for the 8th division in Epiro (comprised Corfù), the 9th (Kozanc) and the IV brigade of infantry (Florina), beyond to supports of army corps, proceeding moreover to a adaptation of the organization of command in the western Macedoria. The provision was put into effect in an extreme disorder as to the chaotic inflow of recalls to corresponded receptive organization a still worse; but it was to greet: of that experience was made to the treasury.

In the restlessness climate that was being created, the minister Grazzi, returned to Athena after a short stay in Italy, on 21 August due to a visit of courtesy to Gen. Metaxas. The version given from the Greek Book white, published in 1940 after the beginning of the hostilities, is not adherent to the relationship sent immediately to Rome from the minister and that induces to bring back of wide extract, also because it supplies an exhausting picture of as the situation was introduced to the eyes of the Greek authorities:

(3) E. GRAZZI, *The principle of the end*, Beacon, Rome 1945. p 16.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"(...) After a short exchange of ideas on the general situation, that Metaxas sees with much pessimism, while I was in order to take dismissal - Grazzi to Ciano reported - the President has asked me to remain, wishing to dwell with me on the Italian-Greek relationships.

His Excellency, taking the movements from a talk that Your Excellency would have had on this subject with the Minister of Greece in Rome, has said to me of being deeply hurting of having to state the continuous worsening of the Italian-Greek relationships, while he was and he remains alive desire of the Greek Government of having with Italy the best relations. It has begun one long exposure of the Italian-Greek relations, beginning from the period of the endorsements, understanding to bring to light this concept: that if from Greek part they can have been errors made, from Italian part he has shown himself not to attached great value to the Greek friendship (...).

The President has resumed his exposure repeating that the Italian friendship attached the maximum value. Accepted having the French-English guarantee does not mean at all that Greece has placed itself in the adverse field to us. With as much sincerity and gratitude he has accepted also the Italian guarantee (...).

His alive desire would be that from part ours came offered it a test that its good intentions are comprised and that Italy attached a real value to the friendship of Greece.

I have had at this moment the impression that, also without to tell what happened quickly, the president had in mind the close expiration of the Italian-Greek pact.

I have said to S.E. that, as I had listened to its detailed exposure, of which I appreciated the tone of cordial frankness, he had now to allow me to answer him with equal frankness. Premised that I could not enter in argument with him on the our politics of the Dodecanese, which regard only us, I have said to him to be unavoidable that in Italy the impression exists that Greece has accepted to become a ring in politics of the western Powers to accept the guarantees offered from these last ones was already in sure which way a neutrality violation. To the offers Anglo-French Greece could have answered, as they have made the States Baltic, not to feel itself threatened by anyone.

The President has interrupted to me for saying that the Greek situation was in that moment very different from that one of the Baltic States. Even if he, personally, was sure that Italy did not nourish proposed aggression towards Greece, the Greek public opinion was lively alarmed and the rest Italian manifestations did not lack, also of press, that they gave dared to the suspicion that the occupation of Albania would have had ulterior developments harmful to Greece. It was cheerful to state as the behavior of the Italian forces to the Greek-Albanian frontier has been the end from the first day more than corrected: however also in occasion of the recent visit of V.E. to Albania they would have been exposed in some locality protesting trusts the occupation of Ciamuria. He could not reject the Anglo-French, offer which, of the rest, covers also the eventuality of a Bulgarian aggression, without to increase to excess the alarm of public opinion. I have answered that this danger to me

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

seemed exaggerated largely. It was until from the 9 April in possession of a cleanest Italian declaration, which would have had to be enough to dissipate every alarm provoked in the public opinion from a wrong interpretation of highly exaggerated manifestations and emphasized by us the adverse propaganda (...).

Has answered that (...) such armaments of Greece, united to the military measures adopted especially in the zone of frontier with Albania, could not give the impression that the Greeks military preparations are directed in special way against us.

Metaxas energetically has repeated to me that therefore he is not and that Greece must maintain itself ready to reject any attempt of violation of its territorial integrity that comes from any side, and would reject with equal decision a such violence even if came from the English side. It has asked me with particular heat to report such his words to V.E. (...).

(...) Of the rest the same contained reference in his message of 4 August to a crisis of last April that it would have threatened the Greek people was, to my warning, unjustified and unfavorable impression in Italy could not create one. In last April has not been any crisis. You it has been only an accommodation of our relationships with Albania, ratified by the enormous majority of the Albanians and that has not threatened Greece (...).

The conversation, than was protracted for beyond an hour, has been concluded in the most cordial way from part of the President, with the renewed ballot from his part for an express improvement of the Italian-Greek relationships and with the prayer that I reported to V.E. how much he had said to me (...)." ⁽⁴⁾.

You notice that our diplomats was completely to the dark of the thought of Ciano on politics towards Greece, more difficult thought as well as known instinctively in how much legacy to the impulsive addresses of Mussolini. The report did not have any continuation. A few days after, with: Mondini, military attaché to Athens, even he as soon as returned from Italy, requested on the other hand an explanatory talk with Gen. Papagos, chief of General Staff, which, premised that "*if just you want to know, all these measures we are taking against you Italians*" ⁽⁵⁾, we denounced: the too many frequent overflights of Greek territory from part of Italian airplane; the alignment of four divisions of infantry, with five in Albania, the province of Korça; and the speeches, I alluded to the next war against Greece, revolts by Gen. Guzzoni to the soldiers and from these last ones resumed a anti-Greek folk song.

(4) E. GRAZZI, op cit, page 51 and seg

(5) L. MONDINI, *Prolog of the Italian- conflict Greek*, Garzanti Milan 1945, page. 155 and seg. Also of this talk the Greek white Book (doc 46) decidedly gives a different version from the truth

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Mondini replied point for point, trying to convince to be exaggerated the interpretation given from the official spheres to vague news or episodes of insignificant value, but the conversation, becoming extended, was carried out and concluded in stiff atmosphere.

To complement of the two conversations, consider opportune to find how much it appears in the Greek Official Report on the campaign:

"The General Staff, with the approval of the Government, had repeatedly touched before the 3 September 1939 the thimble aid issue [Anglo-French] with the military attachés in Athens of Great Britain and France, and had emphasized the necessity to proceed to agreements between the respective General Staff. It did not receive but a constructive answer with regard to (...).

(...) Just as soon as begun the Second World War, the Greek General Staff newly subjected to the Government the argument, and this newly approved of the taken one of contact of the General Staff of the Army with the military attachés at Athens of Great Britain and France (...). Before giving to beginning to such conversations the General Staff of the Army represented the Government, with memorandum dated 2 September, just the thought on the points that would have formed object of the talks, based on which would have been realized the aid deemed necessary (...)"⁽⁶⁾.

The unquestionable fear more and more diffused that Italy thought to attack Greece without giving warning on 2 September, when the official notice of the Stefani Agency disclosed the Italian decision "non-belligerence", relief increased, some day after, from the news of the last attempt of Mussolini to avoid the conflict. Grazzi was soon convened by Metaxas, which expressed the appreciation his and of the Greek people for the initiative of Mussolini and wished "*a next improvement of the relations between Italy and Greece, which put very effectively to collaborate in the political, economic and cultural field*"⁽⁷⁾. Grazzi made quickly to report the talk to Rome. Called to return with a memorandum dictated by Mussolini, wide satisfactory to the ends of that politics of explanation and approach that were personally leading and that it seemed to find a sincere supporter in Metaxas. The memorandum was written up in the following terms:

"I - Italy has already declared in date 1 September that does not mean to assume the initiative any of military operations.

II - This decision of the Council of Ministers that is worth in a generalized manner, is worth particularly in the comparisons of Greece,

(6) Greek S.M.E., op, cit Vol. I, page 49.

(7) E. GRAZZI, op, cit, page 63,

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

III - Also in the eventuality, than Italy cannot exclude given its position of high power, of a its participation in the conflict, Italy will not take the initiative of operations in the confrontation of Greece.

IV - In order to demonstrate in concrete way the feelings from which the Italian Government and in special way is animated the Duce in regard to Greece, the withdrawal of Italian troops will be ordered to 20 Km from the Greek-Albanian border.

V - The Duce does not exclude the possibility in spite of the vicissitudes puts into effect them, to resume and to stabilize that politics of understanding between the Italy and Greece that consecration I had affixed agreements to you of diplomatic character ^{"(8)}.

On 20 September on the press of the two Countries, appeared the official notice circulated from the unofficial agencies:

The Italian Government and the Greek Government, having recognized the usefulness, in the present situation of Europe, to examine with particular attention the state put into effect them of the relationships between the two Countries, have been happy to state that these relationships continue sincerely to being friendly and to being to inspires from complete a mutual confidence.

A concrete test of these feelings has been supplied from the decision taken from the Italian Government to remove its military forces from the Greek-Albanian frontier, as pure from the analogous provisions that the Greek Government is adopting from part its".

The public opinion and the Greek military atmosphere appeared truly raised and a sure climate of sympathy and nearly of gratefulness is diffused - for the first time - towards Italy, opening a period of effective distension that lasted until the summer of the successive year. Still in the issue of the friendship treaty was suspended. Evidently could not be renewed *sic et simpliciter*, neither was absolutely the case to leave it to fall for the meant one that it would have assumed the thing; on the other hand by now the stipulation of a new not connected treaty more with the Pact of the Society in the Nations, from which we were quit, was not possible. Consequently, in its place, a signed note exchange was published, in which the two Governments were declared decided "*to inspire itself to the principles of contained friendship and collaboration in the Pact of friendship, conciliation and judicial regulations signed in Rome 23 September 1928 between Italy and Greece*".

With this action that strengthened the Greek neutrality completed the illuminating of the Mediterranean political horizon. The Italian troops assumed a more rear deployment and the Greeks will proceed, beginning from the 22 September, a gradually demobilization. Soon after Gen. Guzzoni, commander of the troops in Albania, came

(8) E. GRAZZI. op cit. page 65

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

replaced by Gen. Geloso. On 3 December this last one had been received from Mussolini, to the presence of Gen. Soddu, recently named undersecretary to the War in place of Gen. Pariani. Mussolini had begin asserting that the forces of Albania had to not only guaranteed the possession in the cares of the adjacent States, but also against eventual enemies overseas. Having asked Geloso if an attack from part of Greece and/or Yugoslavia were thought possible and against which of the two they would be probably address offensives efforts from our side, Mussolini answered: "*I have said to the Greeks, that Greece is not on mine street!*"⁽⁹⁾ and added to think, given the situation general and held account of that particular one of the Greece, which could make assignment on English aids from the sea and the air but not on land forces, than null was from fearing from the Greeks, while from Yugoslavia all was from attending, also an unexpected attack against which it had protect themselves. The forefront to a clean directive therefore and he specified that he did not admit misunderstandings, Geloso then assured that it would have supplied to adequately organize in the short time and the defense of the Yugoslavian frontier, therefore to guarantee the possibility of a serious resistance; to prepare a able base to receive other coming from units from Italy in order to operate towards the northeast, naturally in contemporaneousness with an other effort exercised from the giuliano border; to improve the street net towards the Yugoslavia in order to facilitate the outlet to operating major unit and to implant a light defensive organization towards the Greek frontier with the alignment of the minimum of the forces.

Had therefore full approval from Mussolini, Geloso left for Albania, where on 5 December assumed the command of the troops.

During all the month of September, but, from part of the Greek General Staff they were continues encounter in several directions. Papagos, personally, speaking with the British and French military attachés "*was not gotten tired to emphasize to them that the way more effective than to give aid to Greece in case of aggression [external] it was that one to help before the attack so as to accelerate the rhythm of the armaments of the country, and first of all supplying very soon arms and the materials already commissioned from Greece to Great Britain and France*", beyond suggesting

(9)Testimony of Gen Geloso. Cfr L. MONDINI, op cit., page 167. E. GRAZZI, op cit., page 80, Grazzi comments that the same identical phrase on Greece he had been turned from Mussolini 11 September (that is some week before), when dictated the message to him for Metaxas

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to invite Turkey to a fast and strong action - obviously in case of war - against Bulgaria, in order to concur with Greece to turn all its forces against the Albanian frontier. Also Lt. Col. Dovas was sent, from the General Staff, to Ankara for direct contacts (10 and 11 September) with the gen. Weygand and with the chief of general staff of the Turkish army for the eventual constitution of a Balkan front, like the First World War; contacts remained very in vague ⁽¹⁰⁾.

A part from this episode, all composed adding without difficulty, nothing upset the renewed cordiality of the Italian-Greeks relationships for many months, and just until 10 June 1940, when Mussolini announced to the world that Italy abandoned non-belligerence. *"I declare solemn that Italy does not mean to drag in the conflict other adjacent people with it by land or sea. Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Egypt to take action of these my words. It depends on them and only them if they will be or not rigorously confirmed"* at all did not tranquilize the addressee of the warning, especially for final clarification. *"Not a single person was in all of Greece - Grazzi wrote - that did not consider as a calamity the entrance of Italy into the war."*⁽¹¹⁾.

2. ITALIAN MILITARY POLITICS FROM 1939 TO 10 JUNE 1940.

The question at the center for a detailed examination of our military politics is not this however seems the case to synthesize of the main lines reporting us to a report written by marshal Badoglio and attached to the per diem history of the Comando Supremo ⁽¹²⁾.

On 16 August 1939 Mussolini had given directives to maintain itself on the tightest defensive political and, if attacked in spite of this attitude, *"to make every effort in order to assure the inviolability of our frontiers"*; substantially adherent directives to the European situation and our truth. I point out a offensive action against Greece and the Yugoslavia remained to the level of operating study, especially in the cares of the second one. It was outlined, therefore, the address to stretch

(10) Greek S.M.E., op. cit., § 30 and 31.

(11) E. GRAZZI, op. cit., pag. 109.

(12) Diario storico del Comando Supremo (DSCS), appendix 1, published by Historical Office SME (USSME), Rome 1986, in the vol. I (11.6.1940-31.8.1940).

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to progressive improvement of the Armed Forces - very slow, in truth, seen the situation on 10 November 1939, "*according to which would have been to the total remake of the army and the air force*" -, however in the conviction that until to 1943 was not previewing for our entering the conflict, as explicitly written by Mussolini to Hitler on 27 May 1939.

On 31 March 1940, in the most secret memo for Badoglio, Mussolini was returned on a point that gives a pair of months was evidently weigh in his mind. In the meeting of the Supreme Defense Committee held in the previous February, he had asserted - probably as struck - than could not himself "desert history". To the alarmed demand for explanations from part of Badoglio, he assured *generically* that his program remained unchanged "*to less than independent circumstances from his been involved will they had to force us into war*"⁽¹³⁾. For how many such circumstances they could be shaped is in an Anglo-French attack initiative is of "the history", the answer tranquilized the head of S.M. G.. But in the foretold most secret document, Mussolini had made a series of deeply meaningful categorical affirmations: "*(...) if the war continues, to believe that Italy can remain out until to the end, is absurd and impossible*"; "*Italy cannot remain neutral for all the duration of the war, without to being obliged to resign from its role, without to disqualify itself (...)*"; "*(...) Italy will not be able to do less than to enter the war; draft only of knowing when and how: draft to delay itself as long as possible, compatibly with the honor and the dignity, our entrance into war (...) in order to prepare us in such way that our participation determines the decision (...)*"; "*(...) the will of French-English or a unforeseen complication could put to us, also in an immediate future, of the forefront to the necessity to grasp the arms*".

As it is seen, not there is more a word of the reasons for which, like Hitler had explained, Italy had need the time until to the end 1942; it is worth to say of the necessity to militarily arrange Libya, Albania and to pacify the Empire; to complete the preparation underway of the 6 ships of the line; to renew all the artilleries of medium and heavy caliber; to realize independent plans in order to make useless the block of the "proprietor democracies"; to realize the Presentation of 1942 in order to gain

(13) P. BADOGLIO, Italy in the second world war, Mondadori. Milan 1946, pag. 35.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

currency reserves; to complete already begun transfer of many industries of war from the Po valley to southern Italy.

Not only, but Mussolini had been made current that the preparations reached the 40 *percent* and that, because of the difficulties of finding of the raw materials, would have immediately *remarkable delay* regarding the program of 1939.

Decidedly, the attitude of Badoglio was not useful to a explanation. First of all he answered "*assuring that all would have been studied and predisposed*", to part serious notes deficiencies in A.O.I. Then he lead the successive meeting of the chiefs of general staff of the Armed Forces in a colorless way: without to activate a current of energetic opposition; based on concrete data, understanding to avoid to enter in a war surely still more wide scope than that one in action; limiting himself to an address of defensive hold⁽¹⁴⁾ and finally concluding with: "*This is a consequence of the singular situation in which we find ourselves. For now studied. Report then circa your possibilities*". The only exception for the attitude to assume in strategic field was made by Admiral Cavagnari, who commented: "*a fleet will put itself at Gibraltar and another at Suez and we will asphyxiate in the Mediterranean*" and after the meeting he cleared, black on white, that the perspective for the Navy was to be itself forced it to the defensive⁽¹⁵⁾. Moreover, and worse still, Badoglio attenuated in the letter of transmission of the report the reserves and the perplexities expressed from those taken part. Its true thought - that at the bottom was coinciding with that one of Mussolini - on the Italian participation resides without doubt in the penultimate paragraph of this letter:

"(...) it cannot that be concluded that our participation cannot be profitable if when a mighty German action (...) has really prostrate to such point the opposing forces to justify every audacity".

That is: we also enter in war but to a war already sure and effectively won by the Germans, because we are not in a position to influencing in any way⁽¹⁶⁾. Perhaps if it had been expressed therefore in raw terms,

(14) Gen. Faldella, observes "This supine just acceptance of the situation of the moment is inexplicable. No war never was gained remaining on the defensive" (*L'Italia nella seconda guerra mondiale*, Cappelli, Bologna 1959, page. 149).

(15) R. BERNOTTI, *La guerra sui mari*, Tyrrenian, Livorno 1950, I, page 166 and following.

(16) Undoubtedly it is not a rich mental guideline of style, however it is opportune to remember that in foreign politics it is, at least, very difficult to act with the meter of the current moral characterizes. However, enough just to leaf through a history book in order to find examples of all the people, in all the times and under all the latitudes, of extreme unscrupulousness in matter from part of the leaders of the State and political men also of greatest stature.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the concept would have made effect, however it is sure that the last paragraph removed every force to the previous passages:

"Such decision, is obvious, is classified to You Duce; it is up to us to execute your orders."

Probably was the decisive movement for our vicissitudes. Unfortunately was allowed to fall. It is true that, after a talk with the Viceroy of Ethiopia, Badoglio returned on to the subject with Mussolini, and this time in much more explicit way, but the thing remained there.

On 10 May all the German front in the West, from Mosa to the sea was put in motion, all sweeping up all violently shaking, reaching the Channel at Abbeville in eleven days. Sure, at this point, Mussolini was taken by the frenzy not to remain excluded from the easy triumph and 29 May at Venice palace by now, he communicated to the chiefs of general staff that the date to establish for the participation to the conflict of Italy "*at first previewed for the spring of 1941*" had been from him already shortened to first of September of that same year⁽¹⁷⁾ and that, after all the German conquests and the determined general situation, "*I has still shortened this distance and considers every day good in order to enter in war, from 5 June next*". Then he passed to announce the constitution of the Alto Comando.

Mussolini knew the conditions of the Italian Armed Forces from the frequent memoranda and the continuous periodic signaling well that reached him directly from the Ministry, from the Joint Chief of Staff, the General Staffs of Armed Forces and the General Commissariat for the war fabrications. Those of May are, like the previous ones, disarming. But, on one side, a sure type of appreciation ability to the data lacked on the war efficiency – rarely enough has he demonstrated of being very sensitive to the really to the issue of the modernization of means, stores and the inventory, not becoming account that just in the materials consisted the immense problem of our Armed Forces - and from the other, believing in just blind political instinct, did not hesitate "to risk". Since

(17) Given that do not find a reply in any document had been evidently established from Mussolini in the own mind, according to a *political* vision of the things

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

it was convinced that the Germany allied with another great power (Italy) was invincible did not want to remain at the window losing what could have been had with little expense, and to his impulsive and suggestible nature the impressive power of the German war machine made to think by now to a Victory was soon at hand.⁽¹⁸⁾

On 5 June, Badoglio participated the strategic directive of Mussolini at the meeting of the chiefs of General Staff:

"The Duce has said that it is his intention, with the war declaration, to move to a state in fact to a state by right, but that he means to reserve the Armed Forces, and especially the Army and Air Force, for future events. Therefore tightened defensive for land and air, in all the fields (...)"

Therefore Italy entered in war.

3. THE ORIGINS OF THE CONFLICT.

In the immediately successive period to the occupation of Albania, Gen. Guzzoni was in charge of drafting a plan of operations against Greece. It was a matter of a simple study and, as such, was embodied in a memo and transmitted to the Commander of the Body of the S.M. in July 1939. Soon after, at the convention of Salisburgo (11-13 August), Hitler expressed his intention intentions on Poland to Mussolini, which it had clear the forecast of a war with France in which very probably Italy would have been involved. Therefore, as soon as Badoglio returned did not convene gave oral directives that the General head of the S.M. transmitted to the three Armed Forces:

"Yesterday S.E. the Head of Government and Duce of the Fascism has convened to me in his office and he has given me the following declarations (...).

Since up to now nothing is changed in the decisions of the Germanic Government, S.E. the Head of the Government, previewing the outbreak of hostilities shortly, has given the following directives to me:

1)...

2) if despite this our attitude we will be attacks from the democratic powers, every effort will be from we made in order to assure the inviolability of our frontiers both of the Home land, and of the colonies is to short expiration will carry out an offensive against Greece in order to stretch to Salonicco;

(18) Cfr MARIO MONTANARI, *L'esercito italiano alla vigilia della 2ª guerra mondiale*, Rome

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

3) situation permitting, and only after to have triggered inner motions in Yugoslavia, we get hold of the Croatia in order to have use of the remarkable resources of said country.

I have made told the Duce that the eventual conflict take us in full crisis of renewal of our materials and that the situation is difficult in Libya (...).

S.E. the Head of the Government has agreed in that and has defined the situation in Libya is truly precarious reserving to himself of giving orders in purpose SE the Undersecretary for the War.

In compliance to the orders of the Duce it is therefore of the maximum urgency that the General Staffs of the Armed Forces to study at once.

- 1) Offensive action against Greece;
- 2) Offensive action against Yugoslavia.

For the offensive against Greece the General Staff of the R. Army will make agreements with that one of the Navy for the immediate occupation of Corfù, with the goal to remove that important base of support to adversary... ⁽¹⁹⁾.

In this sphere, the plan Guzzoni, already ready, was discussed in a meeting presided by Gen. Pariani and to which Soddu, Guzzoni and the unit heads of the S.M.R.E. participated. Then Badoglio communicated to Mussolini results of the studies introduced by the three Armed Forces:

"The studies for the offensive operations against Greece and Yugoslavia are realized.

From them, but, appear that our forces are insufficient especially if, as information, the French will deliver at once a powerful, twofold offensive against us.

Given our inferiority of armament and number will be, therefore, necessary to put to us in conditions in the first place for resisting to this offensive.

Only after to have passed the critical phase of the action, we will be able to examine if we are still able to carry out the offensive in Greece and when it is sure of benevolent Bulgaria and Hungary

Approximately the offensive against Yugoslavia if it will be able some to only speak if the dissolution of such State will have taken place"⁽²⁰⁾.

Mussolini convinced that in the contingent situation it was evidently outside to speak about offensive in the Balkans, so much that on 17 September, speaking with Guzzoni, which had been held in the capital, said to him:

"I know, Guzzoni, about that planned action against Greece not if it will bring nothing... it is to place a distension of our relationships with those

(19) DSCS, f 4625 dated 17.8.1939

(20) DSCS, f 4706 dated 31.8.1939

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Countries... On the other hand Greece is a bare bone in which it is not worth the pain to lose not even one of our grenadiers of Sardinia. What period of good ourselves we made it happen I mean to speak of the coal mines near Athens acquired from us..."⁽²¹⁾

The memo remained therefore finished himself and soon were pending every further development. The original shipment of six divisions to Albania was legacy to the hypothesis of a defensive against Yugoslavia and Greece alliance. Fall this eventuality and improved the relations with the two States, a division was returned to Italy so that, when 5 December Guzzoni was replaced by Geloso, they were found in place: XXVI Command called Army Corps Comando Superiore Albania Troops, three divisions of infantry (*Ferrara, Venezia* and *Arezzo*), one mountain division (*Julia*) and one armored division (*Centauro*).

The total force of major unit - that organic they had reduced⁽²²⁾ -, of the supports and the services amounted to approximately 60,000 men. The guidelines operating were limited substantially to the defensive grip to the frontier Yugoslavia and simple measures of vigilance towards Greece with the units located in Albania. Only in exceptional case, and availability of forces allowing, was previewed the possible shipment of a pair of divisions at the maximum. It was, on the other hand, urgent the performance of all a series of provisions which the organization to assume in war, but to predispose since from the time of peace; the economic valorization of the country, present the capacity convenience to render the economies complementary Italian and Albanian; let alone the impulse to confer to the development of the land and marine communications, and of the telecommunications.

The order of the day for the subject of such arguments during, Supreme Defense Committee XVII Session, was developed in the illustrated reports on 14 February from the interested ministers and undersecretaries⁽²³⁾ and on this base were taken the relative deliberations. He himself dealt, in short, of a generic program of works, but it is necessary to keep in mind that Albania, also with all the possible perspectives, unanimously was considered a secondary theater, to which to watch with a sure attention only in the hypothesis of an action against Yugoslavia, and also in such case covered importance much smaller respect

(21) Testimony of Gen Guzzoni

(22) In particular the rgt of the I.D. had two battalions of infantry and an Albanian battalion each. In August 1940 they will only receive the third Italian battalion

(23) For that one of the Gen. Soddu see appendix. 1

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

to the theater of the Venezia giulia. For nothing Mussolini had not said to Geloso, as provisions for a journey, that Greece was not on his road.

Consequently, in the late spring of 1940, at least for how much the situation concerns the military preparations was little modified regarding September 1939. The five divisions remained in Albania⁽²⁴⁾ progressively left the winter centers and they carried in the zones previewed for the summery exercises (sketch n. 1). In particular: the *Arezzo* division, located in the southern zone (Valona), was moved to north in the zone of Miloti-Scutari; all the forces gravitated towards the Yugoslavian frontier, while to the Greek frontier remained only the *Ferrara*. This is in relation to the directives in vigor is for the complex of news and information reached the Comando Superiore Albania from several sources. The new deployment conciliated the training necessities with reasons of greater safety.

On 22 May Ciano during a visit to Albania. The acceptances predisposed for him were naturally very warm and all addressed, on sage direction of the Deputy, one way:

"The outcry of the crowd had been; "Kossovo and Ciamuria" "Long live the Ciamuria Albanese". Speaking with local Albanian personalities, Ciano had let to go to great promises. His instructions had been fixed were necessary to find a reason or a pretext that allowed to Italy to demand for the Albanians the possession of Ciamuria. He had made to observe that the demands beloveds to the Albanians were above all those that had for object Kossovo. He had answered to me that our relationships with the Yugoslavia were too much friendly because could also be spoken about those aspirations. The Albanians had for the moment to limit their demands to Ciamuria."⁽²⁵⁾

In this climate had been noted a discordant one. The evening of 23 May, at the Deputy, Ciano had invited to a talk to Gen. Geloso - conversation of which signaled in the *Diary* of the minister of the Foreign countries does not exist - to the presence of Jacomoni and Gen. Ranza, who was limited to assist without join the conversation- Ciano began with asserting that the entrance in war of Italy in around two or three weeks was very probable; he specified that the general situation advised not to operate more against the Yugoslavia, that not less you

(24) The *Lupi di Toscana*, already in the zone of Korça, was repatriated in December 1939, stopped the period of tension with Greece

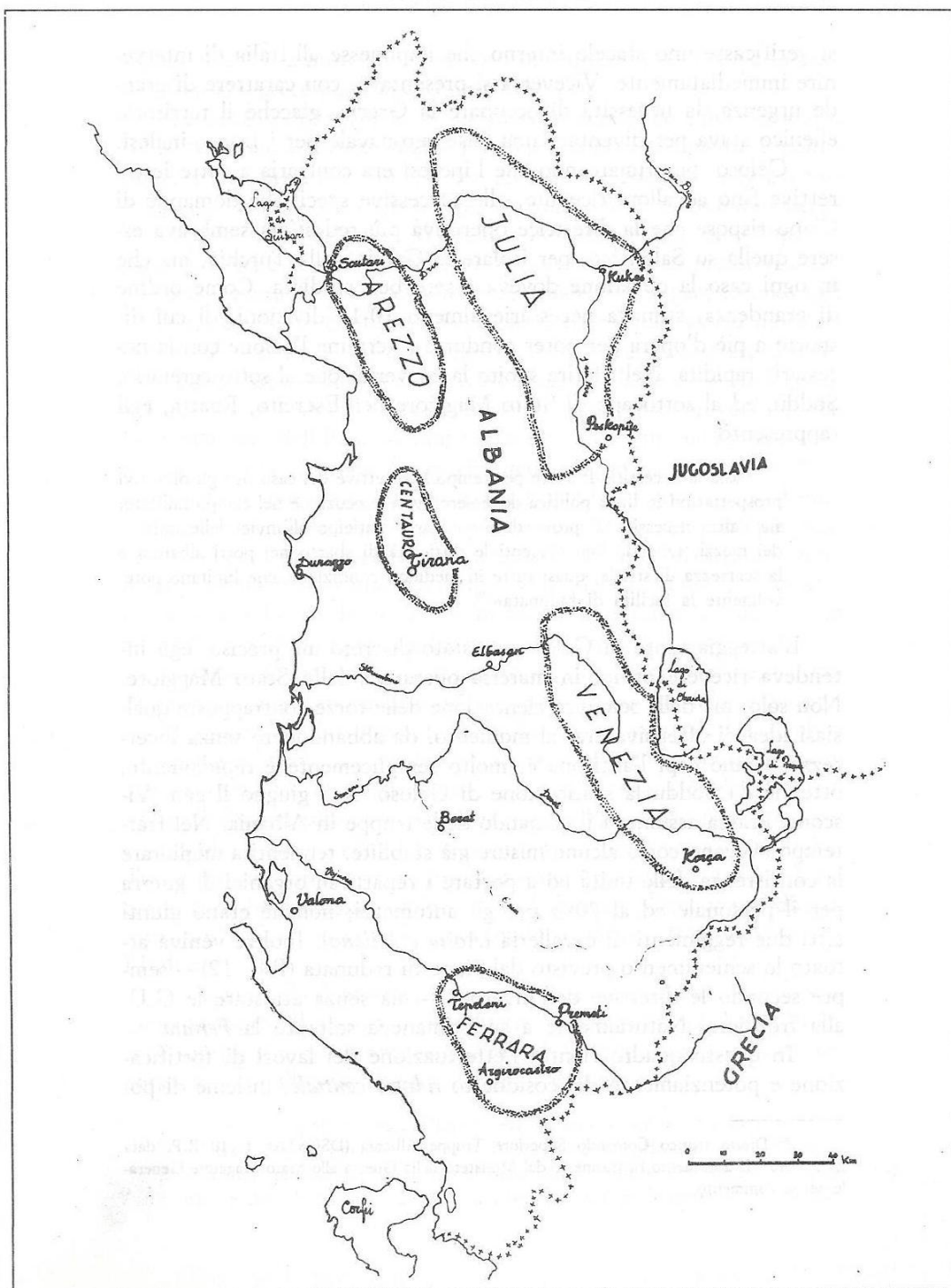
(25) F. JACOMONI, *La politica dell'Italia in Albania*, Cappelli, Bologna 1965 page 225-226

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

The deployment of the Italian G.U. in May 1940

Schizzo n. 1

LA DISLOCAZIONE DELLE G.U. ITALIANE
NEL MAGGIO 1940



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

a decay was taken place inner that imposed to Italy to take part immediately. Vice versa was introduced, with character of great urgency, the necessity to occupy Greece, since the Greek territory was in order to become a sea and air base for the Franco-English.

Geloso, also observing that the hypothesis was contrary to all the directives until then received, to the successive detailed question list of Ciano answered that the more profitable operating direction seemed to be that one on Salonicco, in order to isolate Greece from Turkey, but that in any case the issue had to be well studied. Like order of magnitude, he estimated necessary at least 10-11 divisions, of which deciding to foot the work for being able to lead to the finish the action with the necessary rapidity. In reporting at once the conversation to the undersecretary, Soddu, and to the undersecretary of General Staff of the Army, Roatta, he represented:

"it is the necessity to have for now the directives of the case where objects appear to me online political must have execution in the army camp; it is the other necessity to supply with wide advance to the shipment of the units and means, being held very present the difficulties of disembarkation in the Albanian ports and the lack of roads, nearly all in mediocre conditions, that they limit remarkably the assembly facilities."⁽²⁶⁾

The attitude of Geloso had been discreet but precise: it meant to receive orders in operating matter from the General Staff. Not only, but from the simple listing of the counter-opposing forces whichever idea of offensive was, at the moment, to abandon without uncertainties. Ciano understood the antiphon and, very simply and quickly, obtained from Soddu the substitution of Geloso. On 5 June Gen. Visconti Prasca assumed command of the troops in Albania. In the meantime some measures already established had run, tending to improve the consistency of the units and to carry the units on war footing for the personnel and to 70% for the motor vehicles; let alone another two regiments of cavalry arrived (*Aosta* and *Milano*). Moreover he came put into effect the deployment previewed from the plan of assembled (P.R. 12) - always according to the directives of the winter - but without to attest the G.U. to the frontier. Naturally to the south remained only the *Ferrara*.

In this picture the returned effectuation of the fortification work and expansion of the so-called *reduced centers*, with positions of

(26) Historical diary of the Comando Superiore Truppe Albania (DSCSTA), f. 10 R.P. dated 25.5.1940 - the document was transmitted from the Ministry of the War to the Joint Chief of Staff without comment.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

studied the protection of the ports of Durazzo and Valona in case of Greek-Yugoslavian attack against Albania.

The news of the entrance into the war of Italy had endured obvious glares in Greece. At first the beginning atmospheres social and politically more elevated: the relationships with the Italians, comprised the civil employees of the Legation, were become relaxed and for converged the sympathies grew displaying towards French and English. Then slowly, the press assumed - even if very skillfully - a behavior of preference for the Allies, playing, as it is easy to imagine, on the pagination of articles, on the prominence conferred to the various news, on the same way to offer them to the public. For our part, it cannot be asserted to have given the impression to hold very to the good relations with Greece: in Rome they were received and believed news - often coming from the governorship of the Aegean - not controlled and of not very scrupulous source, via the presence of English ship in Greek territorial waters and, on such basis, the were movements remarked to the government of Athens, that it could reject the protests easily. Not only, but for converged it had all the reasons in order to protest because of Italian aerial attacks first against the lighthouse supply ship, the *Orion*, mistaken for a British oil tanker, and a destroyer rushing in its aid; then, at the end of July, against war ships berthed at Lepanto (but this event was refuted from Rome); then, finally, first of August, against a customs boat close to the island of Salamina. The bulk of the Greek public however ignored such episodes or only marginally knew of them in how much the press, very controlled, having generally passes over it. The precaution of the government of Athens is still more easy comprehensible where memories that the Balkan Pact did not assure some allied to Greece at the forefront to a war with Italy. All the more Turkey had promised benevolent neutrality. The agreement would have only worked if Bulgaria in order first had declared war on Greece and, second to the moment, was Italy took part.

At the end of July our behavior was made newly and unexpectedly sour. On 1 August Minister Politis reported to Athens his feelings to say from the general manager of the European transactions, Throws, in the course of a talk asked for other reasons, than:

"(...) the minister of the Foreign Affairs was very hit in our comparisons and he had it express person in charge to communicate to me, so that I now represent, that the reported incidents in the previous communication they continued and that Italy's stand was not disposed to extending of this state

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of things (...). I have asked if the communication today referred to new facts. The general manager answered that it was idle to stop itself on this point and, since insisted the same one in order to know the reasons of this new warning, left to mean with eagerness that the air could limit communications transmitted to me (...)."⁽²⁷⁾

On 2 August, Ciano called Politis, speeding up in imperative tone the callback of the Greek consul to Trieste in order is expressed in offensive way towards Italy and its Armed Forces. Metaxas ordered the immediate return of the consul without one word comment. On 7 August the undersecretary to the Albanian Transactions, Benini, speaking with Politis, let fall "*has felt, Mr. Minister, with great regret that our relations have become delicate*".

But all this was nothing in comparison to the storm that burst on 11 August. That evening the radio newscast from Rome, collecting a news given to the morning from the "Tomori", daily paper of Tirana closely linked to General Deputy, communicated that the great Albanian patriot Daut Hoxha had been wildly killed by Greek emissaries, which, cut off the head, had it carried in turn for some countries in order to intimidate the irredentism the nationalist Albanians. It is not even the case to remember in the particular episode⁽²⁸⁾, a mounted very awkwardly and infantile wireless and journalistic campaign was triggered by from Rome and Tirana; campaign during which the responsible parties bringing back good clarification and refutation both of the Greek government and of our Legation of Athens. It deserves but to emphasize that, as soon as appeared the article on the "Tomori", the head office information of the Comando Superiore Albania Troops, Col. Catcies, immediately informed the Deputy of the rough misunderstanding on which political accusation was degenerated. The Dalut Hoxha, in fact, was a common delinquent with impressive a judicial *curriculum*, assassinated by two Albanians of the same caliber for the ransom that the Greek authorities had put for a long time on his head. For arrived, previous of the victim of a murder and the fact that the crime had happened on 17 June, that is more than a month and half before, the news was of public domain in southern Albania and of the Epiro.

As if that were not enough, on 15 August, day of the festivity of the Assumption - particularly felt in the small island of Tinos, where

(27) Greek white book, doc. n. 102.

(28) See for the complete narration of the facts: E. GRAZZI, op. cit., page 149 and seg.; L. MONDINI, op. cit., page 206 and seg. Cfr. also F. JACOMONI, op. cit., page 288 and seg., but that is evasive.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the statue of the Madonna, to which they had attributed thaumaturgical qualities, is capacity in solemn procession on the river to the sea, while a warship gave honors with salvos of artillery - a new incident, and still more serious, provoked against us an enormous sense of aversion. At 8:30, little before that the procession crossed the ways of the citizen and while the dock of the port was full of people, a submerged submarine launched three torpedoes against the old *Helli* cruiser, in charge that year to participate in the ceremony. A torpedo hit the ship sinking it and causing 29 dead men and wounded among the crew; two missed the target and went to hit the dock, fortunately not making a massacre (but in the panic that was manifested a death and many were wounded). From Italian side a clean refutation came on the nationality of the submarine and it was wanted to be made to believe to an English provocative action, even if the Greek public opinion was unanimous in attributing to us the responsibility of the event. Grazzi telegraphed to Rome:

"The torpedoing of the *Helli* has provoked in all the country an enormous and painful impression. Some isolated voice does not lack that attributes the responsibility to English, but, especially after today communicate of the British radio, the enormous majority was convinced that the torpedoing has been completed from an Italian submarine. The Greek Government and the local press up to now abstain rigorously attributing the responsibility to one or the other part. Although that the alarm diffused in the country is alive, it has not been up to now taken any measure of military character"⁽²⁹⁾.

The government of Athens avoided that the newspapers insisted on the thing, also when they came recovers fragments of the torpedo written with Italian, and in truth not was some need to excite the popular indignation against us: what Metaxas was not ever successful to obtain was given to him from the incident of the *Helli*. All the oppositions to his regime disappeared, political lack of appetite of the masses stopped by the blow, the Enemy was characterized by all: Italy. On the issue the responsibilities never did it come assessed. Ciano was limited to write in his *Diary*:

"It has been sunk by a submarine, than still we do not know whose, a Greek ship. The incident threatens to take portions greater. For me, there is under the intemperance of De Vecchi. I confer with the Duce, that it wishes to resolve this incident pacifically, of which could be made less. I propose to send a note to Greece: that be worth to carry the controversy on the diplomatic area ".

29) E. GRAZZI, op. cit, page 177.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

However, "to start from 15 August around the Legation of Italy in Athens and to its staff was made empty" wrote Grazzi, which, moreover, it absolutely did not succeed to orient itself on the ends you pursue yourself from its ministry and on the attitude to hold. 24 August, without warning, the orchestrated anti-Greek campaign of the Italian and Albanian press stopped.

It is well, now, to return shortly back and to see that what was happened in the meantime in Rome in order to try, if not just to find, a explanation to our behavior. Ciano - reliable, but with caution, especially for the many omissions – wrote in his *Diario*:

3 July: "I have spoken clearly to the Greek Minister. De Vecchi cables that the English ships, and then also aircraft, find asylum, refueling and protection in Greece. Mussolini is furious. If this music should continue he is decided take to action against Greece(...)".

6 August: "(...) Mussolini atone a lot of a our attack against Yugoslavia in the second decade of September (...) as far as the attack on Yugoslavia does not think that Hitler, but innovation, allows perturbation of the status quo of the Balkans".

10 August: "I speak with Mussolini about the difficulties arising at the Greek-Albanian border. It is not the case to dramatize the situation, but the Greek attitude is very treacherous. The Duce meditates "a force gesture, also because from 1923 it has a suspended account in, and the Greeks are deceived if they think that he has given to the sponge blow (...)".

11 August: "Mussolini still speaks about the Greek issue and wants to know particular on the Ciamuria. It has prepared a Stefani that will begin to churn the problem. And it has made me to convene at Rome Jacomoni and Visconti Prasca, with which means to confer. He speaks about a surprise attack to Greece towards the end of September. If therefore he has decided, the task that he convene to tighten the times. It is dangerous to give to the Greeks the possibility to prepare themselves (...)".

13 August in fact, Jacomoni reached Rome where it was perceived by undersecretary Benini who "*Ciano wished with data pervious to that one of my departure from Albania, a report (than he meant to introduce to Mussolini) on the sad event of the killing of Daut Hoxha*"⁽³⁰⁾. Therefore it was received by Ciano with Visconti Prasca even he

30) F. JACOMONI, op. cit., page 229-230. The Deputy but not filler the note, than instead is available of "*I documenti diplomatici italiani*", ninth series, vol. V. In such document (n. 386), backdated 9 August 1940, to introduce to Mussolini, the killing of Daut Hoxha is still - and in spite of the refutation of Col. Catcies, the evidence of the facts and common the good sense - introduced as political crime: "*It is known to Your Excellence that Daut Hoxha, Albanian of the Ciamuria, animated from great patriotic spirit, was forced some years ago to escape Albania because persecution from the Greek authorities. During his stay in Albania he lead a calm life, dedicating himself completely*

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

called directly. According to the testimonies of both, the minister of the Foreign countries who is announced that Mussolini, *for political reasons*, meant to occupy the Ciamuria, that part of the Epiro considered unredeemed from the Albanians. Ciano not a lot in the particular come down, but specified to Visconti Prasca to keep himself ready to act within fifteen days⁽³¹⁾.

The following morning the talk was resumed at the Palazzo Venezia:

12 August⁽³²⁾: "I accompany the Duce, Jacomoni and Visconti Prasca. The Duce fixed the political and military lines for the action against Greece. If Ciamuria and Corfù will come yielded without blow to hurt, we will not ask more. If instead it will come outline a resistance, we will push the action to the end. Jacomoni and Visconti Prasca see easy the action on condition possible and also, but that make yourself soon. The Duce, instead, remains of warning, for reasons of general military order, to delay the action towards the end of September".⁽³³⁾

In effects, Mussolini interrogated Jacomoni on the inner situation of Albania and on the irredentist feelings of the Epiro, then demands to Visconti Prasca, asked particular on the entity and deployment of the Italian troops.

to the family That although already from the last year, not just notes to Athens the rekindling aspirations in the Ciamuria after the Italian participation in Albania, he was object of several threats of death (...). to the victim of a murder (...) was, first being beheaded, poisoned during a breakfast presented from persons well-known tied to atmospheres beyond frontier; that it tries the premeditation and the conspiracy, with the obvious responsibilities for the Greek authorities (...) To the horrible crimes of blood committed frequently from Greek emissaries in damage of Albanians, the continuous impositions join that the Albanians of the Ciamuria endure from the population and the Greek authorities (...).

31 S. VISCONTI PRASCA, *Io ho aggredito la Grecia*, Rizzoli, Milan 1946, page 31-32. Cfr. G Ciano, *Diario 1937-1943*, Rizzoli, Milan 1980, p. 457, that but not specific.

32) Exists a strange difference in the dates from part of the protagonists. In the works cited, Ciano (page 457) and Jacomoni (page 229) assert that the convocation at Palazzo Chigi happened the evening of 11 August and the following talk at Palazzo Venezia the morning, 12 August. To notice that Ciano, under the date of the 14, writes: "To Livorno in order to see the children".

Visconti Prasca instead (page 31) tells of being reached in Rome and to have spoken with Ciano the 13th, and Mussolini the 14th. In his "extraordinary Resource against the Ministry of War" (page 25), of 1942, he writes he was "called in Rome by the Duce 13 August 1940" and then Finally he adds "after the cited audience of the Duce (13 August)" page 26), in his letter to general Soddu dated 14th, establishes, without some doubt, than the evening before that is the 13th, he has conferred with Ciano and that in the morning in which was written the letter it had seen the Mar. Badoglio.

Gen. F. Rossi says that the talk Ciano- Visconti Prasca had taken place on the 13th then and filler a memorandum of Visconti Prasca for Roatta "*absent from Rome*" dated 13 August, in which the first lists the "Demands for Eventuality G, demanded different from those that the same Visconti Prasca turned to Mussolini the 14th (*Mussolini and the General Staff*, Regional, Rome 1951, pp. 83-84).

33) G CIANO, op. cit, page 457. 34)

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"(...) Continuing in his Mussolini interrogations asks me if those forces were sufficient in order to execute an unexpected occupation of the Epiro,

(...). I answered that in that moment, the Epiro in the judgment of the S.I.M., was weakly garrisoned by troops on a peace footing. An action of the sort that it had analogy with a surprise attack in large introduced resolution probability.

It had to be done, well understood, from the complications and reactions that a similar procedure could provoke, both from part of Greece and from part of its eventual allies, not excluded Yugoslavia. In any case, since the mass of our troops in Albania was located in function of the Yugoslavia while to the Greek frontier the least forces were deployed, would have been necessary a sure time in order to reverse this situation (...) the motorized means available was insufficient much, for which the movements they had to be completed on foot with distances from 300 to the 500 kilometers. At the same time to the performance of a new alignment towards Greece it was necessary to predispose an emergency ordering towards the Yugoslavian theater. The duration of this with of provisions difficult to mask, did not have to exceed determines time limits, not more than 15 days, otherwise the Greeks would have put into effect countermeasures for which the "surprise" would not have succeeded. Without "surprise", the occupation of the Epiro would have had to assume the beginning since the character of an action of force, with necessity of great means and certainly other characteristics. In any case, also in order to put into effect the surprise attack the troops of Albania would have had to be upgraded, (...) rather than to send, in first time, some division to reinforce Albania, would have been opportune to send a sure number of battalions to organically reinforce of those already the existing carrying them to that numerical force and that tactical efficiency (of 9 or more better than 12 battalions) that it did not have the unfortunate binary division, therefore said divisions are poor. In such a way the transports would be limited the personnel and the light material. The immediate transport of the cumbersome technical materials and the services of the divisions, slow-motion was avoided one and the others of the movement (...) Continuing on the argument of the surprise occupation of the Epiro, I said to Mussolini that how much I had answered to his point-blank questions would have had validate the opinion and from the control of the central technical organs (Ministry of War and S.M. of the army) competent (...). my conclusion did not seem of the all appreciate one to the supreme commander of the Armed Forces who soon after dismissed me" ⁽³⁴⁾.

To part the confidence with which he was spoken about war without some necessity, puts account to emphasize as the presence of the minister of the Foreign countries for how much concerned Albania, was fundamental element of the picture. The calling of Visconti Prasca without that the chief of General Staff the General Staff of the Army - on which he depended directly - were some informed, the preliminary talk and above all I invite it explicit to keep himself ready to act within fifteen days are meant of the atmosphere and of

(34) S. VISCONTI PRASCA, op. cit., page 32 and seg.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the moment. It astonishes also a fact: that the Comandante Superiore of Albania, called to Rome from the minister of the Foreign countries has not found time and way at least to inform the General Staff of the Army before going to Palazzo Chigi; and also he observed, as he in the letter of 14 August to the Gen. Soddu⁽³⁵⁾, does not think necessary to speak about the talk with Mussolini, of to report how much was said to Mar. Badoglio, but places in evidence only the order, because as such it has been meant, by Ciano.

And both Jacomoni and Visconti Prasca gave at once to make, as soon as he returns to headquarters. The first one hurried in fact to brief Ciano:

"On the base of the directives you give to me from V.E. I have begun in the Albanian field the job of preparation of the new event.

The press, the radio and Albanian propagandistic exalt the figure of the irredentist Daut Hoggia, killed in fact by the Greeks; they diffuse particularly news on the persecutions to which is made sign the Albanian minority in Ciamuria; they exalt the love for the mother country of the same minority (...).

Covered from this passionate chorus of popular voices, prepared in the largest silence political-military action that will have to be begun to a V.E. signal.

(...) Men of complete confidence will be carried soon in Ciamuria in order to invite the Albanian minority to keep itself ready to any event.

The understanding by me and the Comandante Superiore of the Troops are constant and perfect (...).

Also the military preparation proceed actively. The Comandante Superiore of the Troops is already putting into effect the new alignment to the Greek frontier (...).

I attach a map, to scale 1: 200.000, with the indication of the future border between Albania and Greece.

The new frontier, traced of agreement with the Comandante Superiore of the Troops comprises all the territory indicated to me from V.E.

I assure that, from my part and of how many will be called to collaborate to the new great intentional action from V.E., will be given every contribution of force and faith
"^(36)

It not that on 17 August reached Rome a message of the ambassador Alfieri, from Berlin:

"Had also today with Ribbentrop, to his demand, a long conversation that mainly has been carried out on the issues that I reassume in the following points:

(35) Ministry of War (M.G), f/sn dated 14/8/1940 of Gen Viscorti Prasca - appendix n. 2.

(36) Ministry of the Foreign countries, *I documenti diplomatici italiani*, IX series: 1939-1943, vol. V, doc n. 442 (f/S.n dated 17.8.1940)

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

1) circa the report Italian-Russians Ribbentrop (...) it thinks (...) that such coming together does not have to be discounted with an ulterior insertion of Russia into the Balkans (...);

2) Ribbentrop has moreover communicated to me in a classified way that the German Military attaché in Rome has had from part of General Roatta some relative demands to study preparations circa an Italian action in Yugoslavia (...) Ribbentrop (...) has made present that in this moment the study of pure technical character on issues would have to be suspended also that not aim directly to the unraveled of England, because they would represent for the General Staffs a distraction (...);

3) I have communicated to Ribbentrop the content of telegram 830 relative the Italian attitude in the cares of Greece and according to the received instructions of V.E. I have asked to it which it was his thought in the purpose. It has answered to me to become account perfectly of the situation and not to have therefore null to say via the provisions of precautionary order. But also to such purpose he has demonstrated of preoccupation also of the Russia that could draw from our action here a pretext for an participation in the Balkans modifying the *status quo* that we have additional interest to maintain.

(...) With the fall of England all the other problems we will come automatically resolved. Therefore it is the Greek issue is that one of Yugoslavia are from Ribbentrop seen in function of the begun definitive fight against England (...)."⁽³⁷⁾

"*It is stop a complete, on all the line*" wrote Ciano, than then he added: "*the Duce has dictated the answer to he: in fact put away in the drawer the note that by now was ready*"⁽³⁸⁾. The answer therefore was formulated:

"We become account of the observations of Ribbentrop and agree with him in thinking that the fight against Great Britain is fundamental also at the ends of all the political systemizing. Communicated that for how much it concerns Russia we will not make agreements specific but we will improve the relations from a generic point of view (...). we do not mean to proceed to necessary to action against Yugoslavia. You can confirm how much I said to the Fuehrer circa the Italian programs. Proposals contacts of General Staff had only character of study for being prepared to every event. With Greece we are carrying dispute on the diplomatic plan and we limit ourselves to reinforce with other divisions puts into effect them six divisions that garrison Albania"⁽³⁹⁾.

A hush come down on the "*Hoxha Affair*" and the Albanian minorities in Ciamuria let alone the dispositions of Ciano and Jacomoni here to always hold it arouses the controversy against Greece, but without to accelerate

(37) Ministry of the Foreign countries, op. cit., doc. n. 431 (f. 1273/Segr. dated 17.8.1940).

(38) CIANO, op. cit, page 458. The note had been prepared after the incident of the *Helli*, and with it, flying over on the episode, disapproval for the treatment used by Greece against the Albanian minorities in Ciamuria were made.

(39) Ministry of the Foreign countries, op. cit, doc. 435 (f. 222/838 dated 17.8.1940).

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the times and avoiding, until to new order, a new crisis, in a much had been stated "*superior decided to slow down the rhythm of our action*" in the comparisons of the Yugoslavia and Greece.

4. THE OSCILLATIONS OF THE OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE TOWARDS BALCANIA

On 22 August Mussolini circulated the following directives:

"In relation with the developments of the European and world-wide political-military situation, they have been examined in these complete times the operating eventualities on the theaters Yugoslavian, Greek, Egyptian.

In the imminence of the attack against the English forces in Egypt - that will coincide with the German land attack against Great Britain - the Libyan area becomes the main one on which it must converge attention and efforts; it is the field on which it must make the *mass* on land, on the sea, in the air.

The others two theaters - the Greek and Yugoslavian - not unless the Yugoslavian or Greek or English to take the initiative - they become theaters of observation and vigilance, necessary given vigilance equivocal politics continuation from those two States and the state of mind of the people.

The rhythm predisposed for the alignments can therefore be slowed down instead on those two theaters, completing that one on the east front from 20 October to 20 September and that one on the Greek front to the end of September instead of the end of August.

It is clearly however that once beaten Great Britain the States that have more or less covered friends with London, will not make difficulty to follow those that could be the decision of the Axis ".

Every comment circa the comparison between the clear warning of Ribbentrop and the directives of Mussolini is superfluous. In any case these last ones were received with true relief from Badoglio and from the chiefs of general staff according to how much they had way to observe Gen. Armellini⁽⁴⁰⁾. In Italy three various currents of thought were being developed: Mussolini, first of all, always oscillating between one objective and another under the impression of events had escaped his influence, always afraid to make the part of the subordinate respective to his German *partner*, always more impatient for military Glory, however the one who that, only, to decide. Therefore the group that head to Ciano made and that actively prepared the land for the occupation of Ciamuria, perhaps thinking that Greece was disposed to endure amputations without appreciable reaction. Finally the General Staff, which,

(40) Q ARMELLINI, *Diario di guerra* war, Garzanti, Milan 1946, pag. 64-65.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

almost cut outside from the great decisions and very soon put to forefront to following of mobilizations and demobilizations, unavoidably destined to throw the chaos in the army, it tried to save whatever possible facing as better chasing of the events could.

The invasion of the Ciamuria, as offensive operation to limited arm and of the all independent from the plan concerning Guzzoni-Pariani war against Greece with objectives in depth, had been taken in consideration by the General Staff of the Army - on supreme order, but without specification on the genesis of the demand in July 1940. The study had been entrusted to Geloso, just returned to Rome, and stretched to plan the occupation of the Epiro, Acarnania until Missolungi and the Jonie islands, on the base of a unequivocal premise of absolutely political nature. That it was taken place, that is, *at least* one of the following hypotheses:

- political and military surrender of Greece to contrast our entrance in Epiro; in short a consent, is pure to a force gesture, to yield a part of Greek territory;
- such Bulgarian aggressive attitude sure to nail to the eastern frontier of the Macedonian the bulk of the Greek army and not to leave in Epiro more than three divisions.

The Geloso study (limited objective) - different, therefore, from the Guzzoni-Pariani plan (total objective) - concluded with the calculation of requirements of ten divisions. The General Staff of the Army examined it and modified it slightly increasing of the number of the divisions, in order to have four rather than three to the Yugoslavian frontier and in reserve, and waiting action at Arta. The definitive plan, founded on this study, had to be realized to first of September in *Exigency G*. But it is necessary to make another clarification. Since from the month of July the General Staff of the Army was working, always on directive of Mussolini also to a offensive design against Yugoslavia (the so-called *Exigency E*), and a any participation against Greece, is also most limited, clearly was excluded from its operating vision in the case of performance of the foretold Yugoslavian hypothesis.

To this, in fact they would have had to participate also the forces located in Albania⁽⁴¹⁾, with the task to develop a offensive action

(41) Pet the *Exigency E* was previewed the employment of five Armies one destined to enter in Stiria and Carinzia in order to act on the rear of the alignment Yugoslavian; two in order to act offensively from the Julia frontier; one in reservoir, located initially in the Friulian plain; one destined to act from Albania

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

tending to cut or to threaten the railroad of the Vardar being offered, at least virtually, a hand to Bulgaria. Therefore Roatta had shown to the Joint Chief of Staff the opportunity to increase the troops of Albania, constituted from only the XXVI army corps, and to send in those theaters the Commander of the 3rd Army, the Commander of the IX army corps, four divisions and a regiment of cavalry. In case instead the determined attitude it had been of defensive, it supported, for the sake of greater safety, the transfer of one division and a regiment cavalry⁽⁴²⁾. In other words: or Yugoslavia or Greece. Naturally all the attention of the General Staff was polarized on *Exigency E*, than for the entity of the forces of previewed employment - in only Veneto, a good 720,000 men, 86,000 quadrupeds and 26,300 motor vehicles - and for the limits of time granted for the preparation (according to the first dispositions, before the end of August) by far surpassed the theoretical problem of Greece. Among other things, the ties of political nature places to unquestionable premise of *Exigency G* did not appear easy attainable. However the answer of the Joint Chief of Staff was clean: "*Role of Albania: defensive*". Perhaps for this the putting to point of the plan proceeded somewhat too slowly. Of the rest Gen. F. Rossi, head of the II unit of the S.M.R.E., was explicit:

"Not my results that before 13 October, but the order of Ciano of August, the General Staff had elements in order to think imminent the war on Greece. Until the last days of September the "machine" logistic of the General Staff was "under pressure" for the *Exigency E* and all the studies and the efforts were concentrated on the Julia frontier.

The reinforcements send in September to Albania seemed more that justified, it is that was wanted to be concurred to the operations against the Yugoslavia, is that it was wanted to be guaranteed the Albanian theater from part of Yugoslavian and also Greek attacks "⁽⁴³⁾.

But Visconti Prasca did not mean it therefore. The evening of 13 August, after to have conferred with Ciano, had told the General Staff where, not having found Roatta because in the Veneto in recognition for the *Exigency E*, he dictated to Gen. Negro, operations unit head, the following Memorandum for his Ecc. General Roatta (absent from Rome):

(42) He specifies himself that the theaters - overseas Aegean. AS and AOI - they did not depend, from the SMRE, but directly from the Comando Supremo.

(43) F. ROSSI, *op cit* page 115-116

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

"Demanded for *Exigency* G.

-2 infantry divisions;

-4 artillery battalions transported by pack animal;

-3 mountain battalions;

-3 fascists battalions;

10,000 guns in order to arm voluntary Albanian battalions to employ in cover.

Rome 13 August 1940 - XVIII F.to Visconti Prasca " ⁽⁴⁴⁾

Moreover, specified to Gen. Rossi that, of demanded, a division could flow in *according to time*, since with the rest more the *Ferrara*, already located in zone, and the three regiments of cavalry and grenadiers, also are already in place, *would have to of course could begin the action in Epiro* ⁽⁴⁵⁾.

After the visit to Palazzo Venezia it brought from Soddu and Badoglio, of which the comment to the report of the talk with Mussolini is known. Subsequently, perhaps the 15th, saw Roatta, which, according to Visconti Prasca ⁽⁴⁶⁾, assured him that he would send to Albania the above troops. With much Roatta probability was generic, since we know that the 14th, after the customary report of the head of the Government, Badoglio - until then completely to the dark of these aggressive intentions against Greece ⁽⁴⁷⁾ - ordered to send to Albania a cavalry regiment and to predispose the influx of three divisions to carry out at opportune moment. However the 16th, as soon as returned to Tirana, Visconti Prasca telegraphed to the Ministry:

"For his Excellence Soddu & for information to Superesercito. As of order by the foreign minister the preparation Greek frontier must be completed within 15 days of which already two passed.

It is necessary to demand the foreign minister that organization & comes given to top priority interesting transports military operations shrinking other transports at minimal necessary & demanding at this exceptional command eventual exceptions & for other interesting transports authority or civil population General Visconti Prasca ".

Then he wrote to Jacomoni and Benini "*in order to remember they are the terms of time indicated to you from Mussolini and that in case it had to be acted it could not lose a single day*" ⁽⁴⁸⁾.

(44) F. ROSSI, op cit., page 84 and 115.

(45) F. ROSSI, op cit, page 84

(46) S. VISCONTI PRASCA, op cit, page 34 and seg

(47) Q. ARMELLINI, op cit, page 33.

(48) S VISCONTI PRASCA, op cit., page 36. But they give in his report of the talk at the palazzo Venezia does not turn out that Mussolini has made dates.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

The telegram took Soddu and delivered it to Badoglio, who called Mussolini had with him an exchange of ideas and he exited some satisfied: "*according to the last outcry - the talk of this morning - against Greece will not be made nothing*" said to Gen. Armellini⁽⁴⁹⁾. After that he made to answer annoyed to Soddu from the same Armellini:

"His excellence Marshal Badoglio to give back the joint telegram instructions to me and to send copy to you of the communication made to Superesercito (n. 1944)".

And the per diem historian of the Comando Supremo wrote in date 17 August:

"The Mar. Badoglio orders (f 1944) to the SM of the Army to inform the Comandante Superiore in Albania that the orders he was given exclusively from SME same That in relation to some orders on operations to carry out himself to the Greek frontier, given from the Ministry of the Foreign countries and of which the Undersecretary of SM General he has delivered personally copy".

The conceived message as it follows: "*f. 1944/op. stop To inform general Visconti Prasca that orders to him are given exclusively from Superesercito. Badoglio*", was integrally transmitted from the General Staff of the Army to the subject the same day.

While receiving the relative disposition to the preparation of the three divisions, the S.M.R.E. hurried to communicate the Comando Supremo which major unit in issue could move anytime being mobilization, but had been thought opportune to proceed to some completions that would be completed the 20th for the *Parma*, the 23rd for the *Siena* and the 27th for the *Piemonte*. They would have been sent with 75% of the wartime organic for the personnel; 100% of the organic tables for the armament less the small deficiencies in mortars and the guns from 47/32; 70% for the motor vehicles and the draft animals. That it meant that the force *present* in the units would not have been sure advanced to 65-68%, than the efficient motor vehicles they would not have much exceeded 50% of the lean organic and that the draft animals, almost only half than transport for the infantry, when also all present and efficient ones would be also turn out to you always one third less in from the organic. In case, then it was intentional to carry the three divisions to 100% of the organic ones, have nothing to do with from the time being necessary for the callbacks and the requisitions to carry out, the decision would have demanded further requirements of 10,000 men and 2,500 mules. With

(49) Q ARMELLINI, op cit, page 58

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the occasion, the S.M.R.E. transmitted, for its account, to copy of the telegram sent 16 August from Visconti Prasca and Soddu, "*making present that - as has clearly shown the General Staff of the R Navy. - it is not absolutely possible to think that within the month the three divisions can have reached the employment zone*".

For his part Visconti Prasca replied at once to the callback Badoglio:

"Relation urgent directives of principle received from his Excellence the Head of the Government in expectation of orders from the Superesercito is attended executive orders from that Superesercito. To attended part this makes present that as is known the forces available in Albania are scarcely sufficient for defensive on the entire frontier in case of operating situation or of political tension. Given political tension a single division to the Greek frontier with hundred of km discoveries up to now puts into effect the Greece with glares on Greek frontier inner & already manifested in Albania sharpened from our campaign & arranging, I have given dispositions for precautionary strengthening in those zones to defensive scope. I reserve myself to communicate said precautionary dispositions"

and, at the same time, he addressed to Soddu privately, speeding up the reinforces and meaning the opportunity not to lose time, for the danger that the press left to be transparent with too much evidence the intentions of Mussolini⁽⁵⁰⁾. To find the beginning of the contradictions, because of the lack of clarity in the relationships between the main actors of the drama.

Gen. Visconti Prasca: above all holds for operating decisions the intentions expressed from Mussolini (and *the orders* of Ciano); he asks executive orders with respect to the occupation for the Epiro with a "surprise attack in large", being useful for the Greek unpreparedness; manifest defensive worries on *all* the frontier and especially towards that Greek, for the those gives *defensive* dispositions; he is alarmed sure for all the clamor of the press little in tune with the surprise operation, much to think - for a moment - already even fallen the idea of such operation⁽⁵¹⁾.

The General Staff of the Army: he recalls to the observance of the hierarchical slopes Gen. Visconti Prasca; long understand *between the lines* not to give to much importance to solicitations of other authorities (but one of these he was the head of the government, minister of the War and commander of the operating Forces!); confirmed the day after that "*directives & dispositions You will reach from this General Staff to which*

(50) MG, letter dated 18.8.40

(51) S VISCONTI PRASCA, op cit. page 38

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

you must make head "; he communicates in the same telegram, that he will receive in reinforcement rather than three divisions two, but not the support units, and though *at his tempo*:

"n. 1449/op from the Ministry of the War General Staff Operations - Your telegram 022596 yesterday evidently has intercrossed with ours 1390. In any case I confirm to you its content that is that directives & dispositions will reach You from this General Staff which you must make head I inform to You that three divisions are in course preparations for shipment, of which two with transported by pack animal groups rather than one. The shipment excludes that one of the units detachments demanded by you verbally. When executive orders for shipment reach great aforesaid join some are given soon news with the times of affluence. It is prayed received Roatta telegraph".

After all, Comandante Superiore Albania, evidently fearing not being ready for the 1 September, began movements of troops towards the Greek frontier with a twofold negative results: to go away from the understandings of the S.M.G. and the S.M.R.E. (still under pressure for *Exigency E*) and to push Greece to begin mobilization. The Greeks, in fact by now prepared themselves to face the worse. On 23 August slowly began the performance of a methodical mobilization and alignment to the frontier, than it not only showed to have well assimilated the lesson of the previous mobilization of 1939 but, also, it had the comfort of the convinced adhesion of the population, to which the impending danger did not escape. The mobilization was not general, but partial and for successive quotas: such that it could be developed gradually and tidily. Before they were completed the air and coastal defense, the units of the transmissions; then they were reinforcements and put to point the covering sectors, whose organization was similar to that one of our Guard to the frontier; finally the movement began towards north of major unit located in the south of Greece. On the whole, the completion of the organic of the units was realized on the place of alignment rather than in the mobilization centers, without that more disadvantages taken place.

All are made, can be said, of this preparation were followed by our military attaché in Athens, who held some informed the Authority Centers in Rome but he could not establish an exact nexus with the Albanian events because held intentionally in the dark of Italian understandings⁽⁵²⁾. It is in this period that Greece more than one

52) L MONOINI op. cit. page 214

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

time favored English justifying itself some without much effectiveness when the Legation of Italy moved its disapproval. But it is difficult to think that if also its behavior had been faultless the things would have gone wrong.

On 23 August Roatta made the point of the situation with Visconti Prasca:

"To continuation and confirmation of the telegram of this General Staff n. 1618 yesterday are communicated:

1) V.E. has pointed out to advanced dispositions, had directly, according to which it would have had to be carried out, within the course of a month, a given alignment to the Greek frontier.

2) So, by order of the Duce, such alignment will have eventually to be put into effect not for 1 September, but for 1 October p. v.

3) Consequently the transport in Albania of another three divisions of reinforcements remains predisposed but it does not come carried out until to new order.

4) V.E. will receive in useful time from this S.M. operating directives and clarifications circa the transport of above.

5) In meantime V.E., it modifies, if it thinks it necessary, the breakup taken from the troops to its dependencies, in sight of the alignment of which to the that n. 1 would have had to assume for the 1 September, so that in the period of transition it is not in suffering the cover of the frontier Yugoslavia"⁽⁵¹⁾.

With the Epiroan program was clearly suspended and, with many conditions, sent back eventually to 1 October. It is also true that was little more than a month that time and that to make to flow three complete divisions it was not a little issue, held account of the possibilities of the ports and the Albanian roads, however it also appeared obvious that the problem came followed and that the General Staff, not having some intention to force the hand of Mussolini, did not neglect the several eventualities. To good account, in fact Roatta addressed to Badoglio and confirming that the partial alignment to the Julia frontier for *Exigency E* would have been assumed to leave from 20 September and completed before 20 October assuring that the directives for the *Exigency G* had been compiled. Moreover it advanced the proposal to preview, in successive times, the occupation of Corfù and the Ionian islands, in concomitance or less with the advance into Epiro, and suggested newly an ordering of the Armed forces high command answering Albania more, considering also the entity of the forces to reinforces happened: to carry it to the level of army, on two which, army corps a person in charge of

(51) DSCSTA, f 1650/Secret dated 23.7.1940 of the SM.R.E.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Yugoslavian front and the other that of the Greek. Finally he represented that if the two alignments (offensive towards Greece and defensive towards Yugoslavia) had to be ready for 1 October, had to since the beginning of September beginning the shipment of the units of the programmed influx.

From the letter it could be deduced, with justified perplexity, than the General Staff of the Army thought to a Greek enterprise already decided. In truth, to part a certain deficiency of clarification, it raised arguments for the completion of the planning and took to measures understood to allow in tomorrow - the date of the relative 1 October to the alignment for the *Exigency G*, like that one of 20 October for the *Exigency E*, did not mean the beginning at all automatic of the hostilities - passing to the executive phase with graduality. Obtained the *placet* of Badoglio, Roatta taken at once contact with the General Staff of Navy for the performance of the transfer of the divisions *Parma*, *Siena* and *Piemonte* besides smaller units. Then of said news to Superalba, specifying the order of inflow and informing that the rhythm of the transports would have immediately a sure slowing down and that, therefore, major unit would have been available in Albania within the first decade of October.

Therefore one addressed to Soddu in order to resolve the issue of the organization of command in Albania, being asked to designate an Army commander of and one of army corps, or, in alternative, in case it was wanted to be left to the head of all the troops of Albania Visconti Prasca, to obviously designate to two commanders of army corps, leaving to the Visconti Prasca the title of Comandante Superiore, but of not Army for reasons of rank. But Soddu left suspended every decision in merit.

Realized the shipment of reinforcements and held account of the calendar of the transports, 31 August Roatta thought opportune a new putting to point of the situation with Visconti Prasca: the eventual alignment to the Greek frontier had to be predisposed for 20 October, rather than for the 1st of the same month and the reinforcements in arrival meant the order not to assume a offensive for 20 October but the possibility to assume it when and in case specified alignment. Moreover he informed of the next dispatch of the operating directives of the General Staff; directives that considered all the possible hypotheses, and that is: measures of safety against the Yugoslavia and offensive against Greece in order to occupy the northern Epiro and, eventually, Corfù and the Jonie islands; measures of safety against Greece and offensives against the Yugoslavia

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

(*Exigency E*); defensive on both fronts. With the occasion it invited to go over the location of the troops - a little dispersed and intermingled - so as to collect the divisions more organic.

The letter left Visconti Prasca puzzled. Not only the continuous movement of the date removed the term, than he thought still imminent, but the repeated warning of the eventuality of the executive order let alone the warning of a relative planning to all the hypotheses (that he well excluded a guideline defined in foreign politics) were upsetting what he thought consolidated instead: *the surprise attack in mass* in Ciamuria very soon possible. When he exists confusion of language between a Comando superiore and an dependent Command is good norm of principle to attribute the greater responsibility of the misunderstanding to the Comando superiore. On this plan, evidently Visconti Prasca did not have all the wiring to complain himself; where instead he sinned was in persisting in a wrong initiative because tenaciously and always berthed in directives - so to speak - political and influenced, a lot probably, from the information channeled by the Deputy.

After the explicit German demands not to raise wasps' nest in the Balkans, between Rome and Jacomoni a correspondence exchange had been interlaced that extension like effectively, and with convinced zeal, was maintained *in potential efficiency* as much was in course of preparation *in view of the noted objects*.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Knowing the influence of the minister of the Foreign countries on the head of the Government and with how very rapidity the wind could change direction, always in the presupposed of an easy military walk, not is from being astonished excessive if Visconti Prasca cultivated the Epiroan enterprise. Consequently, the Albanian alignment remained more or less which already modified, it is worth to say oriented towards Greece the *Ferrara* that was collection the valleys of Vojussa and Dhrino, had joined the *Julia* in valley basin of Erseke (less a share, to north of Progradec), two regiments of cavalry in the valley basin of Korça, the 3rd Grenadiers at Delvino and the armored division *Centauro* to behind the *Ferrara* in the zone of Tepeleni.

On 1 September the directives for the Albanian theater were ready,

(54) "Ministry of the Foreign countries, *op cit*, doc 469 (f 1/4946 dated 22.8.1940 of Ciano to Jacomoni), doc 483 (f s.n. dated 24.8.1940 of Jacomoni to Ciano), doc 508 (f. 46745 dated 27.8.1940 of Jacomoni to Benini), doc 509 (f 46774 dated 27.8.1940 of Jacomoni a Ciano), doc 514 (f 46886 date 28.8.1940 d; Jacomoni to Benini)

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

but not still signed, obviously, from the Mar. Graziani, chief of general staff of the Army but also Comandante Superiore in N.A. As we know, they started from the premise that the operations in Albania could resolve to establish, in alternative: a offensive action against Greece (Epiro and Jonie islands): *Exigency G*; or a offensive action against the Yugoslavia (Kossovo and Macedonia): *Exigency E*; or a defensive action against both, separately or at the same time.

For every hypothesis they had been compiled specific directives the first issue (*Exigency G*) was transmitted on 4 September to the interested ones in preview, for obvious gain of time, with reservation of telegraphic confirmation or of addition and varying. On such base, the Comando Superiore Albania had to give run to the operating planning; to limit the consequent predispositions to a uniform outline of the alignment, for reasons of secreticy; to emanate the competence directives, giving some acquaintance to S.M.R.E. before 25 September.

Instead the Commander of the IX Army Corps was in charge of the relative studies to the expedition of Corfu, whose plan was entrusted to the *Bari* division, already predestined for the execution.

The plan for *Exigency G* is only now that comes attributed such denomination to it - different from that one written up by Geloso not only because the objective of the action came closer to Arta (modification already brought from the S.M. of the Army), but also because the cover against the Yugoslavia was entrusted to two divisions, rather than to three, because of the reliable tightened neutrality Yugoslavia. In synthesis:

Actions	Plan Guzzoni-Pariani (1939)	Plan Geloso (July 40)		<i>Exigency G</i> (Sept. '40)
		Original	Corrected by the S.M.R.E.	
Sector Macedone	12 div (Salonicco and Athens)	2 div (Korça)	2 div (Korça)	1 div (Korça)
Sector Epiro	3 div (+) (Gianina)	4 div (+) (Missolungi)	4 div (+) (Arta)	4 div (+) (Arta)
Corfù Occupation and islands	2 div	1 div	1 div	1 div
Cover Yugoslavia via	3 div	2 div	3 div	2 div
General reserve	-	1 div	1 div	1 div
Total	20 div.	10 div.	11 div.	9 div.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

A few days later, Badoglio addressed to the three General Staffs of Armed Forces in order to confer to the studies in course "*a more precise guideline*", on the base of the international situation. In particular:

"1st - *Operations against Yugoslavia (Exigency E)*

The political situation in Yugoslavia is thought by the Duce such made to predict a upheaval very shortly.

Therefore for the end of October must be completed the alignment so as to be in a position to being useful for an eventual inner disarrangement.

2nd - *Operations against Greece (Exigency G)*.

It must consider the hypothesis of our armed participation in order to occupy Ciamuria in Epiro, and eventually the island of Corfù and secondarily the islands S. Maura, Cefalonia, Zante.

The general lines of the operation: those previewed in the "*Exigency G*" of the Directives for the operations in Albania, circulated from the General Staff of the Army with n. 2100 of prot.

The transport overseas of reinforcements being necessary to the troops of Albania must be completed for the end of September.

3rd - *Operations against France ...*".

It is noticed that the planning of which draft was happening in an atmosphere all total, of relaxation. Some shock emerged, a very lot, but then the calm returned. As an example, on 6 September, the undersecretary to the Albanian Transactions Benini, wrote to Gen. Pricolo, head of S.M. of the Aeronautics:

"Caro Pricolo,

in the program that was preparing for being ready, in every eventuality, to carry out the noted action towards the Albanian regions subject to Greece (Ciamuri and to adjacent territories), has been comprised the following points:

a) to prepare of the parachutes in order to start to drop in Ciamuria, at convenient localities, you arms and ammunitions,

b) to have studied from the R. Air Ministry the possibility to prepare an unit parachutists destined to operate eventually in Ciamuria. To such purpose the idea to constitute a express run of training for Albanians is suggested also who wished to join to such action.

On the whole, Ecc. Ciano has approved of such proposals, that they are always thought feasible from the Air Ministry. I do make haste therefore to inform you and you I will be pleased if you will want introduces me to your thought with concern".⁽⁵⁵⁾

(55) Obvious the nexus with the demands for Jacomoni to Ciano "I would appreciate to know when and where the R. Aeronautical could receive in order to train the Albanians yearnings to make part of the nuclei of parachutists who at the opportune moment would have to operate in the Ciamuria"

(Ministry of the Foreign countries, op us:, doc 5091

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Gen. Pricolo, very surprised both for the argument, of which it knew little or nothing, and for the initiative of an undersecretary who had nothing to do with military issues, answered in return mail:

Caro Benini,

the issue that you show me with the letter of the 6 September last I was noticed till now only indirectly: only yesterday, in fact, to short distance from your letter to me arrived a study of the S.M. of the R. Army, relative to an action towards the Albanian regions subject to Greece.

From the operating technical point of view the operations which you point out do not introduce serious difficulties. The Aeronautics already has in equipment of the aerial supply for arms and ammunitions in amount that I think sufficient to the goal.

In the cares of the parachutists, instead, I must advance some reserves particular, for the fact that the few existing units are still in training phase and depend, to all the effects, from the Ministry of War.

As far as the idea to institute a run express of training for Albanian volunteers, I do not have elements approximately their habits to the special employment and I cannot therefore be expressed with adequate cognition of cause on the duration and on results of the same course.

However, in case the plan must pass to the performance it seems opportune who it comes subordinate to the S.M. General, because it gives the necessary directives of principle on which to orient the formulation and the conduct of the operation and to coordinate the activity of the several Armed Forces.

As far as the R. Aeronautica it will be indispensable important and to have precise comparisons (...).

For my part, while I assure you of all the competition of the R. Aeronautica, I will appreciate to be perceived for time, in order to prepare the operation, for the part of my competence, so as to assure the rapid and full success".

At the same time Pricolo addressed, always unofficially, to the Joint Chief of Staff sending copy of both the letters. On 10 September communicated to Gen. Armellini the undersecretary of S.M. of the Aeronautics, Gen. Santoro:

"I have subordinate to his Ecc. Badoglio the letter of his Ecc. Benini and your answer that yesterday you have sent to me. His Ecc. Badoglio has spoken to the Duce of it and he has given back the sheets to me with this annotation: "hunger not anything, Greece is on the wane"⁽⁵⁶⁾.

And indeed on 25 September, in a meeting of the chiefs of general staff near the Comando Supremo, Badoglio spoke about the political-military situation in the Balkans in terms of absolute operating calm,

(56) G. SANTORO, *L'Aeronautica italiana nella II guerra mondiale*, Ed. Esse, Rome 1950, vol. I, page 155.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

without to ventilate actions of from our part, less still, from other people's part.

For Yugoslavia it specified that, "(...) an participation in that country is not probable. He would be expectable only in the case that was an inner upheaval in Yugoslavia, hypothesis that is not thought soon ". And for Greece it said: "(...) These troops, therefore as they have been concentrated in Albania, are - to seeming of the Duce - sufficient in order to hold to in place Greece, which does not have any intention to come to us to attack, because it has a greatest fear is in the cares of Bulgaria than of us. Once put to place these three divisions, we consider the situation as stabilized, being the Greek problem, therefore as well as the Yugoslavian problem, one of those problems that will be resolved to the table of the peace, wanting or unwilling their concern".⁽⁵⁷⁾

On 1 October, melting the reservoir, Roatta informed the interested Commanders that the directives for the eventual operations in Albania had been approved by Graziani, and that therefore they remained confirmed. But the conviction of the S.M. General, of the S.M. of the Army and the ministry of War that the two "*Exigencies*" were sent back *sine die* was therefore knits to induce to take to provisions for a good accommodation of the troops in sight of the winter. So that, the issue of the "surprise attack in mass", a month before the beginning of the operations, came to diminish to a problem of location and accommodation of units, without war perspectives.

While Visconti Prasca, held account of the directives received opportunely from the S.M.R.E., had written up his own ones sending them to the employee Commands so that "*in sight of eventual operating developments of offensive character in the Epiro and confirmation of oral directives already given*" I would like "*since of now to examine the possibility and modality of employment of the respective unit in relation to the supplied base element*" from the Comando Superiore Albania. Just in possession of the partial studies, said conclusive form to the plan and it arranged without some movements of unit towards the zones of probable employment: the *Parma* division had to be moved in the zone of Korça before 10 October; the *Julia* division to conclude the movement from Korçano to Erseke-Leskoviku zone before 6 October; the regiments of cavalry *Aosta* and *Milano* to carry themselves from Korça to Delvino; the regiment cavalry

(57) DSCS, minutes of SM family meeting dated 25.9.40

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Guides to move themselves from Tirana to the Berat-Klisura zone. Naturally series of measures prescribed the adoption of a understandings to mask the movements and to trick the Greek information organs. Then he forwarded a copy of the plan to Rome for the approval, specifying that "*but contrary to orders of the General Staff the present employed directives will be circulated to the G. U.*".

Naturally the answer from Rome was consistent to the picture previously delineated. First the S.M. of the Army transmitted, per good norm, a communication already then for if clear (4 October):

"n. 3357 op. To continuation of telegram 3302 dated 2nd current month transcribes for following norm communication of Stamage (...) stop. n. 2863. Completed transports of the noted reinforcements to Albania, they must be continued and held modernized o the studies on the situation of the operations prepared for *Exigency G*. Such performance but it is for the moment delayed: the troops of Albania must therefore be located in way that can quickly deploy but at the same time in good logistic conditions holding account of the requirements of the season. Badoglio".

Therefore he specified:

"n 3404 op. Also with reference telegram today 3357 it is asked to postpone distribution directives of which your sheet 024487 of 24 September. To give assurance. Superesercito".

Opposite facing to the new address, however not perceived fully, the Comando Superiore modified in part the determined deployment. Since the S.M.R.E. had found that the *Siena*, just disembarked, was destined to the Santi Quaranta-Delvino zone and that is, in his opinion, too much ahead regarding other major unit, nearly all situated along the border; and since he had persevered on the fact that was not dealing to assume a offensive alignment but to hold the forces spaced out to some stage of distance in sight of an *eventual* device of attack to put into effect *on order*, Visconti Prasca explained the criteria is followed in the accommodation of the troops and illustrated the difficulties to find a totally satisfactory solution. Therefore he perceived that in order to put to point the departure device they would have been necessary at least three or four days for the emanation of the executive and concluded order: "*For being able to act in every moment in tight adhesion with the directives of his Ecc the Chief of General Staff and with the understandings about this. General Staff, I would ask of wanting introduce to me on how many days presumably I could count between the eventual warning and the date that*

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

it will be fixed for the performance of the previewed operating alignment"⁽⁵⁸⁾.

While at Rome died a sure air of disarmament, at Tirana it was lived convinced - in spite of everything - of the immanence if not of the imminence of the action. However it must recognize that the demand of Visconti Prasca was human and lawful and that deserved a frank answer, at least a talk.

After all, the troops of Albania had assumed the indicated deployment in the sketch n. 2. Can be already observed in fact, not positive, than in the course of the following weeks will be aggravated. The units were, nearly all, in motion for several days, that if on one side could be useful in order to hold in exercise the units, from the other he psychologically became heavy when the movements appeared not convincing and conflicting.

(58) DSCSTA, f. 024660 dated 5.10.1940

Schizzo n. 2

A hand-drawn map of Italy, showing the outlines of the country and its major regions. The regions are labeled with names in capital letters: AREZZO, PIEMONTE, TRUPPE d. C.A., VENEZIA, JULIA, PARMIA, CENTAURO, SIENA, EPIRO, and CIAMURIA. The map also includes several cities and towns, such as Turana, Padova, Venezia, Verona, Milano, and Roma. A scale bar at the bottom right indicates distances in kilometers (0, 20, 40 Km). The map is drawn with simple lines and includes some geographical features like mountains and rivers.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Chapter II

OCTOBER 1940

1. THE DISARRANGMENT OF THE ARMY.

At the beginning of October, therefore, the dominant thought of the ministry of the War was to assure a convenient accommodation for the troops that opportunely had been sent in the assembled zone of in Italy and Albania:

"The course of the season - Gen Soddu wrote - it imposes to resolve the problem of the spending the winter (...).

Since we are dealing with now to cross:

- in the Homeland, to one alignment very in depth;

- in Albania, to a alignment not thickened to the border of the Epiro but opportunely spaced out to put the troops in the best living conditions and of training, and since such passage has immediate glare on the understood and urgent problem of the spending the winter, I will appreciate with all speed news of the dispositions assumed in order of much above "(1).

The S.M. of the Army had already taken in consideration the issue starting several works, but to this point requests clarifications because one of the given problem changed: the force under arms. The war of Greece they weigh on like hard sandstones some - little - decisions. One of these, and sure not least heaviest, is constituted by the order to dismiss 600,000 men with 1,100,000 under arms in Italy. The previous ones in matter were rather disheartened for the tranquility with which they had been adopted, but in the same time seriously

(1) M.G. f. 146554/2-1-10 dated 3.10.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

indicated by the oscillations of our foreign politics and the consequent strategic guidelines:

September 1939: partial mobilization but much extending; October-November 1939: demobilization;

spring 1940: nearly general mobilization;

July 1940: partial demobilization;

October 1940: wide demobilization.

A similar suffering cannot with impunity be supported from a complex and delicate organism like an army. After the armistice with France a sense of psychological relaxation had been diffused strangely, that it had made to disappear many clouds from the leaden sky of the first decade of June. The optimism approximately the fast end of the war was contagious. The following letter of Soddu to the S.M.R.E. derived some, dated 19 July:

"(...) That place, comes made to think if it does not convene - remaining firm the ordering base - to contract the mass of the Army in the sense to dissolve commands and superfluous agencies and now to demobilize a sure number of unit: all in order to create availability of staff and means to profit of the units of previewed employment and to obtain therefore a mass of smaller proportions regarding they put into effect, but perfectly efficient.

I have already supplied to dissolve the commands of the XVI and XVII Corps; I have interested the General Staff to examine the opportunity to put into effect analogous provision for the alpine Corps.

It could, along this way, to reduce the number of the commands (especially the Army), services and various agencies and to demobilize those units that, in connection with the above indicated guidelines, it is presumed not to have employment.

Much above, beyond perhaps that to concur a strengthening of the mass of previewed employment, it would give possibility to give back to the Country average requirement and turns out little actions to the military employment, coming encounter to fundamental economic necessities and of life of the Nation: necessity to which we must be particularly sensitive, in the concept that the needs of the Army must be framed and always harmonize with those generally of the Country (...) "⁽²⁾.

The informing concept of the provision apparently answered to a criterion of all the acceptable ones: to demobilize, with advantage for the economic life of the Country, to dissolve Commands and units not necessary and to render, for against, perfectly efficient major unit that were considered useful or necessary to conserve itself. And in this spirit who was emanated from the ministry of the War dispositions

² Cfr F. ROSSI, *op. cit.*, page. 72-79..

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

for the exclusive employment in the regiments of all the subordinate officials and captains in s.p.e., but few exceptions. If the above-mentioned measure had been applied in occasion of the demobilization of 1939 it would be shown like initiative probably to greet; adopted war during he could not that to provoke perplexity and skepticism and to provoke damage. In fact: admitted (however it was not made) that the divisions were 100% of organic capacities and the equipments, would be remained for if poor instrument of war; admitted (however it was not made) that the units of the engineers and the transmissions were increase and capacities even if they to 100% of organic and the equipments, would be remained inadequate to the task; admitted (however it was not made) that the Field army quartermaster corps and the services with army corps were 100% of organic capacities, equipments and supplies, would be remained of for if too much delicate in order to support the war in A.S. (as the effort even begin in Greece).

Without to come down in a surveying that delicate from the scopes of the present test, the ascertainment is sufficient that a comparison between organic and the equipments of war of our units and those of other high power - and also at least a not large one, Greece - was decidedly to our disfavor. Sure it is lacked a clear vision the modern war with its urgent requirements, is in time of peace is in the conduct of the operations, however it is necessary also to admit the uselessness to only preview on the paper that that was known not to be able to give. In the "*infinite misery of means of Italian army*" ⁽³⁾, the conduct line could and had search, to time debit, the constitution of much minor a number of ordered divisions but much better, equipped and armed. For committee, it would nearly seem that the number of the divisions (and even the expression *division*) has made to forget first the employment, theirs intrinsically insufficient operating ability and also their the real and not theoretical consistency.

Returning, therefore, to the demobilization of the July, the practical result was a deep perturbation of all the organic and spiritual order of the corps: to not to be connected with obviously from the continuous changes of strategic address. 2 October Gen. Soddu, on decision of Mussolini and approval of Badoglio communicated to the S.M.R.E.: the

(3) On the state of the Italian army before and during the war see. clear syntheses of Gen. M. ROATTA, in *Otto milioni di baionette*, Mondadori, Milan 1946, CAP. I and II.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

"For advanced determination they will have to be brought, with beginning from 10 October p.v., the following reductions in the structure of the Army and the force of arms:

a) dissolution of the commands: Army group to be dissolved, 7th Army, 8th Army;
 b) conservation on the war foot, eventually reduction, of the G.U. that the directives already given from the Joint Chief of Staff and the contained clarification in sheet 2838 in dated 10th current of the Joint Chief of Staff make to think sufficient. And therefore, beyond the Guard to the frontier and the Alpine, the commands of the 2nd and "Po" Armies with that number of divisions (including those of the Sicily and the Sardinia) what General Staff will think to fix in relation to the deployment the performance of particular tasks;

c) reduction of the remaining units of the metropolitan territory to the organic ones of peace, that they could be reinforced in relation to the availabilities of force and the necessity while still alive to hold units that are efficient;

d) reduction of the force to the arms to classes 1917-18-19 and 1920, more the volunteers and minimis shares of other classes in how much absolutely necessary; for such shares, it will be necessary not to come down, in any case, to below the class of 1910.

The reductions will happen with discharge: only for class 1916, in order to assure of the ready return to the respective units, it can be considered if the sent in limitless extraordinary license without convene checks;

e) in consequence of the dissolution of the commands of which in codicil a) will become necessary to supply also to the contraction of the same troops and Army services (...).

4) the aforesaid provisions are not applied to the units located in Albania, North Africa and Aegean and does not modify the dispositions given for the destined troops to the defense of the territory (...)

.....

7) the structural reductions and of force will be begun the 10th current since, and will come continued gradually so that are completed for 15 November p.v.

.....

8) Communications to part as far discharge and rotation of the recalled officers "(4).

At the same time first nomination confirmed the "*criterion to give back to the civil life many subordinates recalled as many is those joints to the Corps*" ⁽⁵⁾, holding that is to level the situation in action near the regiments, nearly the effective force of the inferior officers was equal to that organic one. But this disposition, than apparently interested only the numerical entity of the subordinate ones in the units, had one consequence ill-omened

(4) M.G. f. 146522/2-1-10 dated C 2.10.1940.

(5) M.G. f. 146550/10-2-40 dated 2.10.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

and somewhat long-lasting in the effects for the divisions located in Albania or send afterwards of urgency: many by now expert and prepared commanders of platoon, and also of company, they were sent home and replaced by young second lieutenants who on 28 October had the rank a month.

With the provisions of regarded three distinguished measures: the placement in dismissal of the classes from 1910 to 1916 comprised; the return to the normal bases of part of major unit and existing units since from the time of peace and respective centers of mobilization of some not existing units since from the time of peace; the assumption of a new organic structure from part of major unit.

The placement in dismissal had to begin 10 October. It very concerned seven classes to the arms and naturally it was programmed to groups, beginning from those oldest ones. Since the distribution of the classes in the bodies was besides little uniform, the discharge affected all the regiments at the same time derived some that, it is worth to say with those assigned to dissolve like on those which had to remain to reduced organic while still alive or, full loads. All told, then, with harmful moral repercussions, the deliberation - however forced - not to overseas dismiss the soldiers pertaining to the home units. This had as consequence, between the other things, than sent major unit more late into Albania had newly to be prepared and completed with recalled little trained, being excluded from the callback for psychological reasons the first trained classes. The criticized thing has been a lot but it is doubt that would have been better to recall just the same soldiers as soon as it dismissed them in order to send them to fight: only they, while the fellow soldiers already pertaining to other divisions remained to home. The first group of non-commissioned officers and military troops to recall in dismissal before 25 October was constituted from classes 1910-11-12-13, excluded some temporary categories of specializes. The S.M.R.E. in any case tried not to lose classes 1914-15 at least and 1916 and, initially, were limited to preview the restitution to the civil life of the first two, but determined exceptions, in according to moment and just between 25 October and to 15 November.

The return to base of the units located in the assembly zones, part by highway transportation and part by railroad, became complicated because the base barracks allocated them in peacetime were occupied by the troops at the depots, the units for the Territorial Defense and from other mobilization units. It was necessary therefore to discipline and to graduate the movements in order to avoid traffic jams

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

in the garrisons, let alone disorder and dispersion of materials. Yields moreover necessary to provide itself also - in administrative field, having to put into effect the disbandment on the troops to depots for effect of the respect return of their regiments.

The General Staff of the Army knew well that what meant a movement of that kind and, when it received the order from the ministry of the War to proceed to the contraction of the units, tried of oppose denouncing with all clarity the disastrous consequences to which encounter would have been done. Roatta therefore concluded the memorandum with which he tried to block the provision:

"In any case it is opportune that not subsist misunderstandings of any kind on the ineluctable consequences of such state of things and that is:

- dispersing in the units with moral harmony and the collective training up they to now achieved;
- impossibility to employ however the units at reduced effectives, if it is not proceeded first:
 - to the completion of the personnel;
 - to the redistribution of the arms, the materials and the stored motor vehicles;
 - to one new requisition of quadrupeds, previously reviewed and drafted (if the sale happens);
 - to the reconstitution of the commands, agencies and abolished services;
 - to a sure harmony and collective retraining.

In other words it must very clearly be that, if operations in more were wanted in future to be completed than those previewed for the mass of maneuver⁽⁶⁾, it would be necessary to proceed to a new total mobilization.

It must be very clear also that a new total mobilization is not possible in the short term.

It is necessary to replace to point, to repair, to reorder the equipments; to redraft the sold quadrupeds and vehicles (motor vehicles all maintained); to make to compute of the being necessary force; recompile rosters, postcards, etc; it is necessary, in short, to supply to all the predispositions of mobilization, and this cannot be made in a few weeks.

All the above exposed considerations, also not carrying to a clear conclusion (because it would be necessary given that they now escape) moreover carry to think, in indicative way, that a new total mobilization could not be begun before April 1941 and to complete (in all its elements) before the end of May"⁽⁷⁾.

During executive orders to the Commanders of Armies, of Army Corps and territorial, the S.M.R.E. perceived:

6) 20 divisions to hold nearly with the war personnel.

7) C:fr. F. ROSSI, op. cit., pag. 77-78

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"(...) therefore a complex movement cannot be carried out without some unfortunate: units assigned to barracks occupied from others, units that would have to leave with precedence over the others, and similar.

It is necessary that such misfortunes are reduced to a minimum, by means of tightened contacts between C.A. and defense and, especially, thanks to a great spirit of understanding in all.

From the center is not possible regular in the particular the movement therefore of huge number of units, large and small, assigned to numerous bases.

It is sure that the defense must, however, to leave the destined barracks free the troops that return; but it is equally sure that if, in spite of the good will of all, some of such barracks it will not be free, the units will know to find a contingent and satisfactory solution (...)"

and, fearing also the necessity of an unexpected return to the foot of war, precisely:

"(...) it is repeated, the disposed provisions do not mean total "demobilization" and can, also soon, to introduce the necessity of needing the new equipments (...)"

Between all the divisions located in the metropolitan territory, the *Bari* had a very particular task: the eventual occupation of Corfù. It dictated predestination remained unchanged and major unit was prepared on organic of circumstance, is worth to say that it was reinforced from elements of services but its battalions had a reduced force (600 men). On 13 October the S.M.R.E. sent to the division the following communication:

"The performance of Contingency G (Corfù) is, for the moment, delayed. But they will have to be continued and held modernized to the relative studies, so as to be able to put them into effect, if necessary, in the shortest possible time".

But on 12 October Mussolini had known that, as a result of the demand by the Romanian government, a strong German military mission had entered in Rumania in order to guarantee the safety of the oil zone. Ciano wrote:

"(...) after total indignation for the German occupation of Rumania. He said what has deeply and worst impressed the Italian public opinion, since from the arbitration of Vienna the nobody expected this result. *Hitler always puts me ahead of the completed fact. This time he is satisfied with the same currency: he will know from newspapers that I have occupied Greece. Therefore the equilibrium will be reestablished.* I ask if he is of agreement with Badoglio: Not yet - he answers - *But I give the resignation from Italian if someone finds difficulties in order to strike the Greeks.* By now the Duce seems decided to act. In truth, believed a useful and easy operation"⁽⁸⁾.

(8) G. CIANO, op. cit., page. 470.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

2. THE MEETING OF 15 OCTOBER

On the 13th Ciano wrote: "*Nothing to report*". It was not true. Of new unthinkable decision was one. In that day and the successive 14th and 15th the idea to attack the Greece took shape and consistency. From the examination and comparison of the testimonies of the interested ones and a few documents to the actions, strange differences of position of the protagonists regarding as per what they introduced themselves to the meeting, of determining, on 15 October.

We see, first of all, Soddu.

It seems it was known the decision of Mussolini of the 12th, perhaps from the same one, perhaps from Ciano, and has telephoned in the late afternoon to Roatta - and not to Badoglio, of which he was deputy head⁽⁹⁾ - informing him that he had to make war against Greece, but without to come down in the particular. As a result of such communication Roatta would have at once brought from him, trying in vane to persuade him to suspend the discharging in the divisions destined to complete the number of the 20 of which to the Guzzoni - Pariani plan, let alone being looked on to, always in vane, a solution for the issue of the organization of command in Albania⁽¹⁰⁾. During the talk with Roatta he did not specify, strangely, any date. But just, two days later, the morning of the 14th, would have participated the news to Visconti Prasca, saying that

"*Roatta still did not know*" ⁽¹¹⁾. It is not comprised as he could think possible that knowing, as he had to know, that executive order (f. 3084) had left from the General S.M. likely the afternoon of the day before.

Badoglio, for his part, the morning of the 13th was made current of the decision – it is from believing via in short because various the order would have been attached to the per diem history of the Comando Supremo - from Mussolini or Soddu:

13 October: "(...) Mar. Badoglio gives operating dispositions (f. 3084) to the Chiefs of general staff of the Armed Forces on the performance of the Contingency G".

And then:

(9) Gen. Soddu at the same time covered the assignments of undersecretary of State for War and deputy head of the S.M.G.

(10) Cfr. E. FALDELLA, op. cit., page 267.

(11) Cfr. S. VISCONTI PRASCA, op. cit., page 46.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"Note of the General Head of S.M.:

The Duce orders me to make to prepare the operations for the Contingency G so as to be able to begin for the morning of the 26th"⁽¹²⁾.

No objections has resulted in any move of for the form (the decision taken without to consult the General head of S.M.) of for the substance (war enterprise in a critical moment for the army and while Graziani was in serious difficulty in A.S.), neither privately. Not requests even in order which reason the 26th had to be the date of the *dies irae*... Perhaps it thought of the hundredth time a straw fire:

"Stamani the Duce has ordered that from the 26th current all it is ready for an action against Greece (...). Would have to arrive at Salonicco and the Pireo with a lightning march in order to avoid a (...) dangerous situation. But we have in Albania only nine divisions. Crazy things! It has changed to seem many times, we still hope changes"⁽¹³⁾.

The very strange fact remains that has not thought useful to inform Roatta if not limiting himself to send to the S.M.R.E., beyond to Supermarina and Superaereo, foretold order 3084 op. dated⁽¹³⁾:

"To start from 14 October the twelve days previewed from the R. Navy for the transports being necessary for the expedition of Corfù.

At 0 hours of the 26th all must be therefore ready for being able to begin in Albania the previewed action (Contingency G).

For such date the antiaircraft organization will also have to be completed.

Superaereo to provide the previewed reinforcements of aviation of Albania and to the alignment of the units ".

In the late afternoon of the 13th, Roatta was warned the successive morning, at 11:00, at Palazzo Venezia, - where he would have been received by Mussolini with Badoglio for dealing with "*a eventual campaign for the occupation of all of Greece*"⁽¹⁴⁾. Thinking to be a matter of the Guzzoni-Pariani plan, he called the head of the operations unit and he was brought to current of the particular of the plan and the modernized situation of the Greek forces:

"Examined the situation in word – told very late - and fortified of maps and necessary data, I approached, at the indicated hour, to Palazzo Venezia, and exposed to General Head of S.M. - that he approved of to them - my ideas generated approximately the eventual future campaign of which over.

(12) DSCS, date 13.10.1940.

(13) Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., pag. 111.

(14) M. ROATTA, op. cit., pag. 120.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Introduced that we were in the office of the Duce, these declared that the attitude of Greece had become therefore favorable to the "Allies", that he judged inevitable declaring war on them and to occupy it. (These continuous changes of ideas, in therefore little time, on purpose of issues of fundamental importance, and without first to consult the supreme military authorities: the campaign against Yugoslavia, demobilizing of the exercise, campaign against Greece, constitute obvious test of the lack of vision of with of the conduct of the war).

The Duce requests therefore which forces were judged necessary and which it was the indispensable time in order to carry them to the foot of the work, with all the corresponding material.

I answered that I judged necessary, until from the first beginning of the campaign the contemporary employment of 20 divisions.

And in as far as the time I meant that three months from the executive order to the beginning of the hostilities were necessary. On condition, but, than the army it is at once remobilized and that the necessary restrictions on land and civilian maritime transports were all adopted, in order to assure, in said term the arrival in Albania, and their deployment with the material and troop, line of departure (thereby comprised huge depots of supplies, without moreover jeopardize the transports for Libya).

Mussolini addressed the Head of the General S.M., which was associated to my points of view. Then the Duce approved of them in his turn, and at once giving orders of all the dispositions of the case and to prepare operating plans" ⁽¹⁵⁾.

The talk finds reply in the per diem history of the Comando Supremo:

"Note of his Excellency the General Head of S.M.:

- the Duce has represented to me the necessity to occupy Greece in order to remove every support to the English fleet and to eliminate the English influence in that country. I have cleared that the studied operations preview only the occupation of Epiro and the island of Corfù. Gen. Roatta felt as established that the occupation of Greece required the employment of 20 divisions and that the General Staff of the Army will have to complete the studies on the subject".

The two versions substantially agree. Gen. Roatta was much precise; nothing in his narration indicates that it has come to acquaintance, neither in the morning of the 14th and nor during the call to the Palazzo Venezia, *of the executive order for the 26th*, already circulated by the Comando Supremo. Now, the f. 3084 of the General S.M. must have arrived at the S.M. of the Army in the evening of the 13th or, to latest, but it is hypothesis of insufficient reliability, in the early morning of the 14th.

Given its content, it is found hard to admit that the operations section,

(15) M. ROATTA, op, cit., satisfied 121-122.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

which he was to put the deputy chief of S.M. to the current of the plan against Greece, the general has not immediately informed, yes from avoiding their going to the Palazzo Venezia to be in the dark of that order. Moreover he is of fact that Roatta, when it sent to call Visconti Prasca for give him the executive order, did not manifest, to how much seems, of reaction of alarm: he delivered the order nearly be a matter itself of *routine*. Nevertheless with that sheet⁽¹⁶⁾: he transmitted the cited one f. 3084 of This morning (that to the morning he did not know); he authorized the distribution of the directives for *Contingency G*, sent from the Comando Superiore of Albania at the end of September, and for which he had opportunely arranged a adjournment, previous indicated orally modifications⁽¹⁷⁾; it foreshadowed the new organization of command; it assured the express shipment of the groups of mountain artillery promised.

Always in the afternoon of the 14th, Gen. Roatta called his collaborators and traced the general lines of a tending action to suspend the relative orders in course immediately to the demobilization, to remobilization the army completely and to define a plan of transports circa the shipment of reinforcements into Albania, in order to reach the 20 divisions thought indispensable. Finally he made to prepare a plan of employment for all these forces, so as to obtain since from the beginning of operations a massive effort and without interruptions⁽¹⁸⁾.

To complete the picture of the three months of preparation is from citing a telephone call that Soddu seems to have made to Roatta: *much time will pass*!⁽¹⁹⁾. Instead Gen. Armellini, that evidently had been informed from Badoglio⁽²⁰⁾ after the meeting, wrote neither that of the Marshal nor of Roatta has placed in the due evidence in their works:

"This morning on the 11th the Marshal speaking to the Duce of the issue of Greece. Not draft of Epiro, but all of Greece. Consequently nothing more of Corsica, nothing more of Biserta but integral occupation of the Greece for which Bulgaria would walk to our flank. The Marshal, to the exposure of this program, has reminded the Duce that the studies till now completed - on the base of nine divisions - limited to the occupation of Epiro, taking advantage of irredentists motions to favor of Albania and that a immense plan demands - having the competition of Bulgaria - at least 20 divisions. The Duce has decided that the General Staff face a new study -

(16) DSCSTA, f. 3833 dated 14.10.1940 of the S.M.R.E.

(17) unknown.

(18) M. ROATTA, op. cit., page 122.

(19) Cfr. E. FALDELLA, op. cit., page 271.

(20) Mar. Badoglio in his cited work (pag. 51) is rather evasive and unclear.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

with ten days of time! - after that it will decide if to give, in first time, course to the previewed operations to limited beam in order then - perfecting the preparation and making in the meantime to flow new troops - to give run to the immense operations than according to time, or it is better to attend the completion of preparation and to make all what, binding together two times"⁽²¹⁾.

That is: ten days of time for the study and then decision if to join the Geloso plan modified from the S.M. of the Army (1st time) and that Guzzoni-Pariani (2nd time), or if to throw to sea the first one and to put in execution the second, that total. There is from observing that those ten days of time in effects do not find correspondence in any source. Probably Armellini calculated period 15 (day after the distribution of order 3084) -25 (days before the beginning of hostilities) as useful in order to modernize the studies, already ready, and to suspend or to give to the way to the predisposed *Contingency G.*

Also on the 14th, Visconti Prasca, received from Roatta the executive order, of the commented part "command organization" and the paternity of the "directives", but nothing on purpose said of the fixed *via* for 26 October, that it means that he thought the order in totally feasible issue. And when, in the late afternoon, he had occasion to speak with Lt. General Jacomoni, and he convened in Rome and put him to current from Ciano of the imminent enterprise, "*confirmed that the action was decided for the 26th of that month, that is at a distance of twelve days (...). could not say more - wrote Jacomoni - and much less illustrate the plan of the operation (...). He added that absolute his reserve therefore (...) had from me to be comprised and to be accepted from the moment that the action exited by now from the within of the Albanian aspirations on Ciamuria*"⁽²²⁾. He meant to allude to the total war on Greece? However, not even in this center a word of distrust or simple doubt, and that is attended well, in a moment in which for before serious uncertainty turns the Lt. General manifested (at least *a posteriori*). 15 October, in fact, towards 08:00 Jacomoni brought to Palazzo Chigi, more turbulence. He wanted to make to read to Ciano a note compiled on the demand from Gen. Gabrielli, assigned to the Depout, exactly that he had served "*as guide for whom I would have had to say (...) in the meeting to which I was convened*"⁽²³⁾. It did not succeed and then he made to read it to Visconti Prasca and to Gen. Ranza, "*that had supplied some varies elements*", and he at Palazzo Chigi.

(21) Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., pag. 113.

(22) F. JACOMONI, op. cit., pag. 251.

(23) Ibid, pag. 251-252.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"Ciano made me to only call when he was already in the elevator of the Palazzo Chigi with General Visconti Prasca in order to go together to Palazzo Venezia. And I succeeded finally in talking a few minutes in the corridor that was crossed in order to go from the elevator of said Palazzo Venezia to therefore Sala delle Armi. I said as the had talk the day before with General Visconti Prasca had still increased my worries: the encounter to the most serious difficulties was gone, if not quite to a disaster. Ciano answered to me that the decision on the war of Greece was not of my competence and it was not even a judgment on our military preparation. I could not therefore join the conversation with regard to, but only supply the news that came to me demanded: *"not so that the draft of a issue that you regard Albania, but directly Italy and Greece"*, he specified, *"we have need of pledges"*⁽²⁴⁾.

From the historical diary of the Comando Supremo:

"At the of the meeting with the Duce to which he attends with the His Ecc. Ciano, Jacomoni, Roatta, Soddu, Visconti Prasca in order to realize in the cares of the operations against Greece. The results appear from the report minutes ".

From the diary of the Gen. Armellini:

"In as far as immense operations, the quarter of hour of Greece is this! Meeting by the Duce today, present Marshal Ciano and Jacomoni want their war and probably they will have it. It can are given in fact - if once again the Duce does not make machine behind - that between days declares war on Greece without not to estimate - on the Greece part, that it is not little - the consequences of strategic-naval nature due to the English reaction. All: Badoglio, Army, Navy, Aviation are contrary, but they will have to probably endure. The Duce can also is given has reason when he says that it sees in the political situation a solution that the technicians - which are capacities to estimate the military situation closely and are to the dark one of that politics - do not see. To entrust themselves therefore blind and to hope that all ends well" ⁽²⁵⁾.

From the diary of Ciano:

"Near the Duce at Palazzo Venezia one has place meeting for the Greek transaction. Badoglio, Roatta, Soddu, Jacomoni, Visconti Prasca and I participate. The meeting is steno graphed.

Later, at Palazzo Chigi, I spoke with Ranza and Visconti Prasca, who show their military plan and with Jacomorii, that exposes the political situation. It said that in Albania the wait is alive and enthusiastic. From part of the Albanian youth, that it always has been more classified in our comparisons, now manifestations have been opened than consent " ⁽²⁶⁾.

(24) Ibid, pag. 253.

(25) Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., pag. 115.

(26) G. CIANO, op. cit., pag. 470.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

The meeting had been called for the 11th. They had been convened:

Ciano, the two Italian exponents in Albania: Jacomoni and Visconti Prasca, Badoglio and Soddu. They were not convened: the chiefs of general staff of Armed Forces, but Roatta was called, of urgency, to begun the meeting, while the others were neglected; the main Italian exponent, in Greece, Grazzi; the head of the S.I.M., Ame. Coloro who had not been invited, all against the war, could have refuted with concrete data determined affirmations that they were made with much superficiality.

According to the original minutes ²⁷⁾, Mussolini opened the sitting illustrating the scope of the meeting: *"to define the modalities of the action - in its general character - that I have decided to begin against Greece"*. Then he specified: *"This action, at first must have objectives of marine character and territorial character (...) is that is those that must give to the occupation of the Jonie islands (...) and the conquest by us of Salonico. In according to time, or concomitance of these actions, the integral occupation of Greece (...)"* Then, still, added: *"Specified therefore the issue I have established also the date, that to my warning It cannot be delayed of an hour: that is the 26th of this month. This is an action that I have long matured from months and months; before our participation to the war and also before the beginning of the conflict (...)"*. Finally, it pointed out to Yugoslavia and Turkey giving some for sure the neutrality, and - to Bulgaria, giving some for probable the active participation to our flank.

The beginning was typical. One premised psychologically sets up and held outside from an eventual examination, from which the rest will come down like natural consequence:

"I have decided to begin the war against Greece": against this affirmation of the Head of the Government there was not that to endure it in all obedience or to give the resignation, without means ways; *"This action, - at first... in according to time"*: with regard to there was little from replying. The concept already had been sketched the previous day and, to sure conditions, accepted by the military heads;

"the date, than to my warning cannot be delayed of an hour: that is the 26th of this month". On this point in any case there was discussing, if other not asking explanations on the origin of the choice;

(27) The Meeting Minutes 15.10.1940, attached n. 3. The version given from Mussolini in July 1944 on the *Camere della Sera* and then *Storia di un anno* is mutilated. The omitted parts are specified below the foretold attachment.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

"Bulgaria (...) *can constitute a pawn in our game, and I will make the steps necessary because it does not lose this only occasion*". Here the study of *Contingency G* skipped. Bulgaria constituted really a pawn, and the main one, for *Contingency G*. It had to engage the bulk of the Greek army. How it could be thought that in ten days King Boris convinced and entered into war, when he still did not know nothing and his army was not oriented nor mobilized?

Then was invited to speak Jacomoni on "*the apparent situation of Greece from Albania*" ⁽²⁸⁾. The picture outlined suitable was dosed of white and black. The worry to limit himself to report the obvious. No trace of the "*feeling of anguish*" that had tried the previous day ⁽²⁹⁾ of the worries of an hour before:

- "*public opinion is ostentatiously taking care of*";
- "*the Greeks now appear decided to oppose to our action*" but
- "*the active propaganda (of radio Argirocastro) results that it obtains of the effects*";
- "*Greek resistance will be variously influenced to according to our action will be quick, decided and imposing or prudent and limited*" but "*the state of mind of the population appears very deeply depressed*";
- "*exist the danger 'port of Durazzo'*" but "*the aircraft of Greek aviation are 144, that that would not constitute a serious apprehension*";
- "*the only worry could derive occupying Greece partially (...) in order not to leave the English air force bases which can bomb Albania if they were in a position to sending imposing forces*".

Visconti Prasca did not have hesitations. Only the reservation regarded the climatic conditions in the sense that "*in some weeks the season of rains would provoke to series difficulty for the conquest of Epiro and the base of Prevesa*".

He began with assuring that the operation "*will be ready for the 26th and is introduced under very favorable auspices*" and was realizable "*in short time: ten or fifteen days*". In purpose every guarantee existed: "*preparations has been finished in the minimum particular and is perfect as much as humanly possible (...) is the first phase of our operation to lead*

(28) It is meaningful that he did not interest in the view from Greece, that is from min. Grazzi!

(29) F. JACOMONI, op. cit., pag. 250.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

with depth in the best way "and" it could allow us to liquidate all the Greek troops". The favorable omen was based on concrete data:

The Greek forces had been "*calculated at approximately 30 thousand men and we have a superiority of two to one*" and he concluded with an affirmation that nobody could have imagined would have revealed much true, even if in diametrically opposite sense: "*the operation has been prepared so as to give the impression of a reverse movement in a few days*"!

As far as the action on Salonicco and Athens, Visconti Prasca raised some reservations on first "*because of the seasonal course*" and found that in order to begin "*the march on Athens, the base is the occupation of all Epiro and the port of Preveza*". Finally he touched the psychological aspect, naturally in triumphalist tone: the spirit of our troops "*is highest, the enthusiasm is to the maximum degree*" (that it was true), while the Greek soldiers "*are not people that are content to fight themselves*" (that it was false).

To part a plan of brushed rhetorical enthusiasm⁽³⁰⁾, absolutely superfluous given the totally unjustified optimism that was pervading at least some of those present, ineluctably the affirmations of Visconti Prasca could not but strengthen Mussolini in his historical decision. The Comandante Superiore of Albania had accepted the premise, assured that the operation was be predisposed accurately, guaranteed that all would have been ready for the 26th. As if that were not enough, Badoglio took part:

"The operation for the Epiro studied by Visconti Prasca goes well. Given the safety of the left flank, the opposing forces would not have to introduce many difficulties".

Pronounced therefore the phrase became a validation to how much already was emerged. The issue "Epiro", that is the Contingency G, was therefore, to this point, definitively strengthened. I point out to the safety of the left flank was not much luminosity, for the truth. It could refer to the safety of strategic character regarding Yugoslavia and in this case it would have been exact, but obvious and without many glares on the invasion of the Epiro. It could instead - and it can justly be thought that this has been the thought of the Mar. Badoglio, given the obvious opportunity to examine the thing also in the smaller, but most important picture

30) "The only manifestation of indiscipline that I have had to find has been that one of officials and soldiers for excess in the anxiety of wanting to go ahead and to want to fight" and "I have ordered that the battalions bill-poster always also against a division".

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

- to answer to the tacit question if the left flank of the operating units in Epiro were guaranteed from our alignment in the Korçano, if this, in other words, were in a position to resisting to the possibilities of Greek counterattack from Macedonian⁽³¹⁾. If such surveying had been developed, of it would be derived the conclusion that the forces in Albania could not slowly offer on purely military resolution certainty, were not that is sufficient to operate in Epiro because they had the flank of the uncertain Korçano.

Probably, very different the General head of S.M. would have been the continuation of the meeting where had said: "*given and not granted, until contrary test, the safety of the left flank...*" and "*Data and not granted, because wrong, the force ratio indicated by the Gen. Visconti Prasca...*". Unfortunately, to every step ahead it was added a brick to the construction:

"Examinee now the Greek problem, I assert - Badoglio continued - that to stop only to the Epiro does not correspond to the situation (...). That we must occupy all of Greece if the problem wants to be profitable. For this they are necessary approximately 20 divisions while in Albania we have nine plus one cavalry. It is obvious that in these conditions three months are necessary"⁽³²⁾.

If it meant with that to refrain the ardors and, showing the maximum objectivity and therefore the necessity of greater forces, wished to make to accept a delay of three months is necessary to say that he has been bad psychologist, not noticing that it was throwing benzene on the fire. It was now the time of Roatta, which, entered while Jacomoni spoke, account of the coupling of the two plans had become but it had thought that such choice, more not connected with the contemporary employment of twenty divisions, depended exposed the particular and most important circumstances during its absence, to the beginning of sitting⁽³³⁾.

"Holding account of all – joining the conversation, therefore, of reinforcements with Badoglio - we can count on the equivalent of eleven divisions. In order not to stop us at the Epiro it would have to intensify the shipment of troops. That also in order not to give the feeling that we do not have more breath in order to go ahead. To study therefore at once the problem of the total occupation of Greece ".

(31) 4 November Badoglio telegraphed to Visconti Prasca: "*My norm is firmly being berthed in a point during the battle. This point for you is the field of Korça...*" DSCS, tele 3561/op, dated 4.11.1940.

(32) Badoglio mistaken in the calculation. Towards the Epiro there were 4 divisions (*Ferrara, Siena, Julia* and *Centauro*), 2 in the Korçano (*Parma* and *Piemonte*) and 2 towards Yugoslavia (*Venezia* and *Arezzo*). In total 8, more the grouping of the shoreline.

(33) M. ROATTA, op. cit., pag. 123.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Mussolini, then, began to pull on the time: the 26th beginning of the operations, 10-15 November occupation of the Epiro. Therefore from 16 October to 15 November (one of the three) of useful time was a month. Immediately Visconti Prasca relieved it in the calculation:

"The shipment of other troops depends on what it is the development of the plan and they cannot be sent to occupied Epiro".

Therefore Mussolini asks *"as it comes seen the march on Athens, after to have occupied Epiro"*, argument on which by now it was calm. All, in practical, answered favorably. Visconti Prasca: *"I do not see it with many difficulties. A group of 5 or 6 divisions would be sufficient"*; Badoglio: *"I would think more urgent the march on Athens that on Salonicco, also because English disembarkation to Salonicco does not seem probable"*; Roatta: *"They want to pressure us also from that side"* and *"two divisions are sufficient"*.

Therefore the Duce could assert: *"I agree totally for the occupation of Athens"*. He repeats, is true, that it thought the Bulgarian participation probable, but nobody picked up the fragility of such supposition. Then he continues:

"And, now we come to another two subjects: specified all that, how many additional divisions do you think that is necessary to send to Albania in order to occupy all the territory that leads to Athens?"⁽³⁴⁾.

The question was tendentious, or denoted little clarity of ideas, or perhaps both things. Mussolini knew that in all twenty divisions were necessary, therefore the account was easy: other twelve⁽³⁵⁾. Therefore as it was easy to take the ball to the leap in order to totally replace plan in argument. But the only one that answered was Visconti Prasca and his answer was imprecise *"at first three organized mountain divisions would be enough"*: to that what was comparing this first time) and inexact *"these troops could be carried to the port of Arta in a single night"*: affirmation narcotic for his outspoken order; only that the potentiality of Preveza to that one of Durazzo agrees). However for Mussolini it was sufficient in order to conclude, after some observation on aspects of all the marginal ones:

"Reassuming: offensive in Epiro; observation and pressure on Salonicco and, in according to time, march on Athens ".

(34) As it is seen, Mussolini had to notice, pleased, that his own strategic conception was developed with a logical indeed geometric.

(35) Eleven, in case the grouping of the shoreline is wanted to be considered as a division.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

In the talk they had been eliminated, one by one, without contrasts, nearly that the interlocutors were hypnotized, all the elements conditioners of the operating problem. *Contingency G* was based on the sure and strong pressure or Bulgarian threat: here the Bulgarian participation was accepted simply as probable. The occupation of Greece demanded twenty divisions to foot of work: it had been reduced to three divisions of mountain "at first" and however *after* the conquest of the Epiro. The preparation of such invasion imposed three months: the possibility (so to speak) of drop off three divisions in a night to Arta had eliminated every difficulty. The issue of the marine transports was essential for the shipment of the divisions and the supply in Albania: it was resolved neglecting it. The conquest of the Epiro could, with much imagination, being thought as a political-military enterprise concurred *oborto collo* from Athens, but the occupation of all the country not! of the front we would sure have had the Greek army, already nearly on war footing and deployed, in greater part, to the Albanian frontier: well, this simply was ignored. The demobilization in course had immediately to be blocked, as already asked from Roatta: also on this argument come down silence. The quartering of the units in time of peace, issue that, after all, re-entered in the competence of the Commanders of the Army or Comandi Superiori, had so taken care the undersecretary for the War from induce asking assurance on his solution: now that the was magnifying problem for the increment express of the men and the draft animals and that the perspective appeared to make to encamp them for three winter months, that is until await the end of January in of the beginning of the march on Athens, not a word came said.

In the 1942 Visconti Prasca wrote: "If the military circumstances that accompanied our action against Greece introduced very many estimated risks, they offered also a percentage of highly summarized exposed favorable elements, and whose favorable character was transitory and of short duration..."⁽³⁶⁾. In truth it is right to recognize the acute sense of uneasiness that test reading itself the report of the meeting. Which risk assessment? which favorable elements? It must said that, in spite of all the optimism that to shining from the report, to the end of the sitting, someone was raised uncertain and taken care. Roatta, to his say, express his doubts on the opportunity of an hasty attack therefore

(36) From an article in "*Il Messaggero*" of the 12.7.1942.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

and with few forces to Soddu, to which he would have answered to be calm because circumstances of political order gave the certainty of a succeeding easy express and, also not connected with employed forces⁽³⁷⁾. The secretary of the meeting, Lt.Col. Trombetti, than exiting made an analogous observation to Mar. Badoglio, had in answer: "*Politically has made all*"⁽³⁸⁾. Undoubtedly he circulated the voice insistent, even if cloak of mystery, according to which high Greek personalities, adverse to the regimen of Metaxas, would have churn in our favor so as to force it to receive our demands and, however, it makes us to meet a very mild resistance; but it is not easy to acquit who after all was the highest military exponent from the lacked explicit demand for political guarantees, let alone from equally lacked explicit warning that if such guarantees had been revealed deceptive the probability of a disaster outlined sufficient - high mind in order to become fearfully dangerous⁽³⁹⁾.

But, the day after, Badoglio rethought to us and, bring to the customary every day report to Palazzo Venezia, he returned to the subject. The purpose of the Marshal is not known any the tenor of the conversation, however his comment to Gen. Armellini: "*the action against Greece is decided. Objective the Epiro. After the operation will be able to have development until occupying all Greece sending the troops that are necessary*"⁽⁴⁰⁾ and its annotation on the historical diary is sufficient in order to indicate that he had very understood and accepted the design of Mussolini:

"Note of His Ecc. the Head of the S.M. General:

I have illustrated to the Duce the modalities according to which could take the operations in Greece: ...

1) To collect all the troops being necessary to the enterprise and to begin therefore to promptly carry the enterprise to the goal;

2) To begin the action in Epiro with the troops in place and to proceed in according to time with the troops that, in the meantime, could flow disembarking in the gulf of Arta.

In both cases time previewed three months approximately. The Duce decides that it comes put into effect the second case (...)".

(37) M. ROATTA, op. cit., pag. 1270

(38) E. GRAZZI, op. cit., pag. 221.

(39) According to Gen. Visconti Prasca, towards the end of the meeting, Mussolini asked: "Then we are sure of Victory?". The answer of the general was conventional (op. cit., pag. 70).

(40) Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., pag. 116.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

In part the disembarkation at Arta that evidently was very wished for appear possible, was not subsisting a shadow of a doubt: *meanwhile* we take Epiro with what we have in Albania; *then*, with three months of time, we will occupy Greece entirely.

3. TOWARDS THE WAR.

In the meantime, and just the same evening of the 15th, the chiefs of general staff of the Navy and Aeronautics had been informed from Badoglio and, still before an official report, Admiral Cavagnari himself rushed, the afternoon of the 16th, for the Marshal illustrated, with a memorandum, the absolute impossibility to disembark troops at Preveza and exposing his real worry for the probable installation of air force and naval bases from the English side in Greek territory and the consequent threat on Taranto, threat much serious one to render the permanency of the fleet problematic. The next morning the three chiefs of general staff gathered the Comando Supremo and they were expressed without periphrasis. Roatta manifested his serious perplexity on all the operation in the conditions of the moment; Cavagnari not only confirmed the utopia of a disembarkation of three divisions in a night at Preveza, but also it specified that in order to carry to Arta the three divisions it was well to calculate three months and insisted on the danger that would have been outlined on Taranto with all the glares denied in fact of naval strategy; Pricolo, that still disappointed for the shipment of the aerial Corps in Belgium, declared that for the fixed date he could not assure neither the material alignment of the units on the interested airfields and that one had need of a deferment of the beginning of the offensive at least week.

Badoglio assimilated fully the observations - probably in his heart if he waited for to them - and promised that collective meeting near the head of Government would have asked for the in order to examine the possibility of a delay. Then, since Mussolini had brought to Terni with Soddu, went from Ciano. The visit therefore is brought back in the daily history:

"I have had a talk with His Exc. Ciano to which I have reported on the operations in Greece:

- 1) possibility to only occupy the Epiro;
- 2) to wait two months in order to make to flow the troops necessary in order to continue the action;

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

- 3) possibility, in the meantime, from part of Greece and England to act on our bases;
- 4) forced pause of Graziani and possibility from English part to disengage a share of aviation located there.

His Exc. Ciano was demonstrated worry and he has assured me that he will speak to the Duce".

In truth, the little official lines do not seem to recall with effectiveness the atmosphere of that conversation, but of it they evidence the scope: to find influential allying. Other error of psychology. Ciano for its account wrote:

"The Duce is at Terni. It comes to see Marshal Badoglio myself and he speaks to me with great seriousness of the action in Greece. The three chiefs of general staff unanimously have pronouncement themselves against. The forces put into effect would be insufficient and Navy does not think of being able to execute some disembarkation at Prevesa because the depth are much too low. All the speech of Badoglio has a pessimistic intonation: he previews prolonging the war and with it the exhaustion of our lean resources. I listen and I do not discuss. I assert that under the political aspect the moment is good. Greece is isolated. Turkey not moving. The Yugoslavia not even. The Bulgarians, if they enter, will be with us. Militarily I do not have judgment elements. It must that Badoglio, how much as told me, says it without reservation to Mussolini"⁽⁴¹⁾.

Naturally, also Ciano flew over on how much could compromise it. In that circumstance in fact he would have declared "*of being successful to having from his various Greek notables, some making part of puts into effect their Government, for the upsetting of the same Government and for the passage of Greece from our part. He added that it had cost little expense, but that the success also a justified this expense.*

He said moreover that there were understandings with the troops of Epiro (...)"⁽⁴²⁾.

In these forty-eight hours, 17 and 18 October, contracting the ominous influence of two persons on the Greek adventure: Ciano and Soddu the first one had *listened and not discussed*, carrying the speech on the political plan; the second, to the morning, the Tiburtina station, in attended of Mussolini, to a clear question of the Gen. Favagrossa on the reliability of the voices circa an imminent war against Greece, had answer *excluding* the participation!⁽⁴³⁾. But not only, as soon as returned from Terni and informed of the movement of Badoglio, Armellini advised "*to find the way to avoid the meeting*"⁽⁴⁴⁾. Then the following morning,

41) G. CIANO, op. cit., pag. 471.

42) P. BADOGLIO, op. cit., pag. 53.

43) C. FAVAGROSSA, op. cit., pag. 146.

44) Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., pag. 117.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

early, was introduced to palazzo Venezia to brief Mussolini on the opposition of the chiefs of general staff and on the demand for convening that the marshal would have made. After he arrived Ciano:

"I find Soddu in the antechamber, that he has spoken with Badoglio⁽⁴⁵⁾, which he declares that if the action in Greece will have place, he will resign. I report all to the Duce, that it is already of pessimist humor for Graziani. It has a violent explosion of anger and says that he will go personally to Greece *"in order to assist to the incredible dishonor of the Italians who have fear of the Greeks"*. He means to march at all costs and if Badoglio will give his resignation he will accept them calmly... "⁽⁴⁶⁾.

In the meantime, Soddu:

"(...) it comes here furious. He says to me that the Duce had been put to the current from Ciano⁽⁴⁷⁾ of the difficulties shown by Badoglio, that of it had a bad impression, that he had put in doubt the work of collaboration of the Marshal having reached to say: *"I make divorce (...) I do not say to ask councils, that of it he does not have need, but to hold me to the current at least. A lot must be persuaded that before speaking with him he speaks with me Is in the condition of a sandwich. The being gone from Ciano has been an error. Goodness knows what Ciano will have said to the Duce"*⁽⁴⁸⁾.

Therefore he entered in the office of the marshal. Soddu was persuasive and Badoglio docile. At 09:20 Armellini telephoned Roatta informing him that the meeting at palazzo Venezia more would not have had place. At 11:00 Badoglio went to report. Ciano records:

"(...) But Badoglio does not only not give the [resignation] but yesterday does not repeat to Mussolini much said to me. In fact the Duce narrates that Badoglio has only insisted for having some day of delay: at least two".⁽⁴⁹⁾

The marshal limited himself to write on the daily history:

"Note of the General Head of S.M.:

- the Duce told me about the operations in Greece and, in sight of the state of the preparation, he concurs to delay the beginning by two days;
- being useful for the delay they are brought to me from Gen. Roatta and I have ordered him to study the possibility to send to Durazzo one new division".

Strange, in truth, the way with which the talk was synthesized: *"the Duce told me..."*, like if the argument were returned on the carpet

45) The discussion does not balance: Soddu still had not seen Badoglio.

46) G. CIANO, op. cit., pag. 471.

47) Also the discussion does not balance here: when Soddu exited from palazzo Venezia after the talk with Mussolini, Ciano had still not spoken with this last one.

48) Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., pag. 117-118.

49) G. CIANO, op. cit., pag. 471.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

for initiative of Mussolini. However, from this moment the orders for the war were followed without more objections. The first one regarded the determination of the date of beginning of the operation (28 October), the second the shipment of another division, and with regard to it is from noticing the comment, perhaps legacy to previous considerations but in any case little clearly, with which Soddu accompanied the order:

"For how much superfluous, be a matter itself of his competence, I pray to want to remember General Visconti Prasca, than he has available the *Piemonte* division, which could be replaced in native place from the division which refers puts into effect the determination of the Chief of General Staff. Of other part the Comando Superiore Albania Troops arranges already in that territory of approximately 150,000 men".

Perhaps he thought more than sufficient the forces at the disposition of Visconti Prasca?

At the same time he reached the S.M.R.E. and, for information, to the ministry of the War, demanded from part of the Comando Superiore Albania Troops of "*immediate shipment*" of following reinforcements "*in relation to that established in the meeting held in the presence of the Duce and of how much he had to communicate to me etc. Roatta* ": the note four groups of mountain artillery; the motorized division (Trieste) for the successive movement along the Arta-Missolungi direction;

one division of mountain infantry (*Modena*) for the eventual developments on the Macedonian front in relation to the Bulgarian intervention on Salonicco.

Moreover, he asked the preparation for two mountain divisions, a division of mountain infantry and three regiments of cavalry, "*to disembark at Valona or at Port Edda, just as soon as the occupation of Corfù happened, and in the ports more to the south, once occupied the islands,*"⁽⁵⁰⁾. Unless were not exist direct agreements, but of which concrete elements do not find themselves, this demand are not closely consequential to the famous meeting nor organic. First of all, march was be a matter evidently of troops not interested in the Epiro but to the events following (on Athens); in the second place, the auspicious immediacy contrasted with the made affirmation that of the reinforcements could have spoken "*to occupied Epiro*"; then, the first shipment regarded two divisions (motorizing and mountain) while he had said "*at first would be enough three organized mountain divisions* ";

⁵⁰⁾ DSCST A.f. 024905 dated 17.10.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

finally, since I compute exact of the necessities had not been made, would have been his interest to emphasize the thing in this headquarters. It is perceived, still, the lack of a inter-forces General Staff or, at least, of qualified representatives within the "Comandi Superior ". How could be considered seriously in the operating center the disembarkation of divisions at Valona, at Santi Quaranta (Port Edda) and in the small Epiroan ports, when also the simple unloading of the materials at Durazzo still constituted a unresolved problem?

At this point Roatta sent to Albania Gen. Francisco Rossi in order to become person of account of the logistic situation. During the visit, these had to state a new adverse element: the bad meteorological conditions, whose violence rendered prohibitive the employment of aviation (another paper that revealed non-penetratable) and extremely difficult the land movements and the supplying and via sea. Therefore the 26th telegraphed Rome looking for the opportunity that *"day beginning operations would have to be fixed by the Comandante Superiore on the place"*. The delay proposal - than of this it was a matter, in short - was soon received by Roatta and by Badoglio, which it had known also from Cavagnari and Pricolo that the preparation were enduring delays because of the conditions of the sea. But Mussolini did not accept the suggestion confirming instead the date of 28 October for the beginning of the operations *"even if the conditions of the sea prevent the disembarkation at Corfù, operation that will be able to be made in according to the weather"*, as he brought back Badoglio in the daily history, the 26th. However, Visconti Prasca, come to acquaintance in a successive moment of the telegram of General Rossi, the disapproval and with his message of the 27th confirmed that it would have begun the operations at dawn of the 28th. He justified, later, such decision alleging that *"the bad weather if were uncomfortable for us was also for our adversary and masking our advance prevented it to make a use effective of his arms especially of the artillery, employed by the Greeks in a skillful way"*⁽⁵¹⁾.

Among the many perplexities that rise in examining the carrying out of the events it must place also the made urgent demand from the Comando Superiore, on 23 October, of 500 trucks, plus others 50 for every division for feeding the operations beyond the border. To ask approximately 1,000 motor vehicles at a distance hardly five days from the beginning for the hostilities and being known that at Durazzo was not possible to unload more than 50 trucks per day (cutting off other supplies) is what that leaves

51) S. VISCONTI PRASCA, op. cit "pag. 89-90.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

forbidden, above all if put in relationship with the insistence to begin operations on 28 October, against the proposal of person sure characterized. And it is also from finding that only 26 October were demands to the S.M. of the Army as part of the order to transform the Direzione Superiore of Services for the *Albania quartermaster corps* in the Army.

As far as the Jonie islands, it had been since the beginning agreement between the S.M.R.E. and the S.M.R.M. for Corfù, but the first one saw with most insufficient enthusiasm the occupation of Saint Maura, Zante and Cefalonia, the only one, to its warning, that it was worth the pain to occupy, as had written to the Comando Supremo in date 20 October. Cavagnari then proposed to organize the disembarkation to Cefalonia with 2,400 men equipped of an autonomy of 20 days. Badoglio, than already had expressed to Mussolini the opportunity to limit the action to Corfù initially was reserved of dealing the subject in plenary sitting with all the interested ones. In fact, the 24th, examined the definitive plan of operations and put on the carpet the collaterals aspects. For Corfù determined the occupation in case was only always possible to carry out disembarks in two points and that the conditions of the sea the without consent difficulty; for Cefalonia, the action was from seeing only in a successive moment; for the other islands there was a delayed *sine die*. Then on the 29th Cavagnari informed the Comando Supremo who, because of the ulterior worsening of the atmospheric conditions and the sea, the "Corfù" operation where -, it goes to think itself decidedly delayed.

While the 16th had left from Rome the message of Mussolini for King Boris ⁽⁵²⁾, which but he answered negatively:

"(...) Because of unfavorable circumstances that have prevented and to delay a satisfactory rearmament of his army, and encircled from neighbors who You know, [Bulgaria] are seen forced to act with much careful consideration and precaution, without for this renouncing to his sacred rights and his historical mission. For such - reasons, Bulgaria is obliged to abstain from an armed action (...).

Nevertheless (...) with his attitude that is not led to misunderstandings, engages and will continue to engage a considerable part of the forces of his neighbors (...).

Naturally the diplomatic refusal hit Mussolini, which with Badoglio he wanted to diminish the failure:

52) Minister of the Foreign countries, op. cit., doc. 738.

53) Ibid, doc. 746.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

"We will do without him. The march of Visconti Prasca will be very fast that will attract towards Athens the Greek forces of the north, if also not unravel in order to go everyone to own home"⁽⁵⁴⁾.

But on the daily history Badoglio, on 21 October wrote:

"The Duce has communicated to me a letter of king Boris of Bulgaria that assures him of being able to withhold, for his account, 8 Greek divisions, but that it must act with much precaution being to contact with important Turkish forces".

It seems strange that the marshal has effectively read the answer of king Boris, as it turns out from his memories. It has been induced to think that Mussolini, holding the letter in hand, of it has reported some passage, deforming according to his desire the entity of sure blocked the Greek troops to the Bulgarian frontier. That would explain the little conviction with which Badoglio exited from the room⁽⁵⁵⁾. In any case, this was the last and probably biggest occasion for opposing decidedly to the enterprise, being fallen, without more some illusion, prejudicial politics.

Also at Tirana and Athens the events were being followed carefully, but with very various eye. From the Lt. General, Jacomoni wrote to Benini in date 19 October without some trace of the pessimism that had preceded the session of the 15th:

"Based on the orders received from His Excellency the Minister I have intensified the action understanding to create the more favorable atmosphere to the express and victorious development of our military operations against Greece (...). Albanian of our confidence and that they enjoy prestige in Greece will leave tomorrow in order to meet at Janina and in other cities with their friends who could effectively propagandize the advantages of a collaboration Italian-Greek-Albanian to the war power of Italy and ridicule the uselessness of a game of force between Italy and Greece.

Such action carried out to the immediate eve of our military participation stretches to create disorientation and discouragement in the mind of managing personalities. Our friends address themselves to influential religious heads and high officials of the army.

It being reported to me that official Greeks in service along the frontier line have been interested to the treatment made from Italy to the Albanian colleagues, I have asked His Excellency General Visconti Prasca to make to intensify the contacts between the officials of the two exercises, giving to confidence and eventual aids and supports to the Greek soldiers favorable to our cause. An effective action in such field could lighten the beginning effort of our troops. Therefore I have put to disposition of General Visconti Prasca, for such goal, a consistent background (...).

54) P. BADOGLIO, op. cit., pag. 54.

55) Ibid.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

The Persons committees from Greece confirm the sense of worry and perturbation that reigns there for our eventual military participation. The populations of the Ciamuria await with anxiety our arrival.

Greater and more precise news I will have for them from the fascist supreme councilman Nebil Dino, currently in Greece on a secret political mission and that he will arrive in Tirana in the next few days in order to report.

His Excellency General Visconti Prasca has yesterday assured me that on 23 October his troops will be ready to release (...) ⁽⁵⁶⁾,

and, then, on 21 October:

"The political work meant to create in Greece a favorable atmosphere to the express development of our military operations with results continuing to be promising (...).

Also comes reported that units of the army would be demoralized for the state of uneasiness in which they live. The troops would lack of lodgings, materials and provisions (...).

He is of the opinion that if our action begins it will be violent will have a disbandment of the Greek forces.

Much feared is the aerial action.

I allow myself therefore to recommend the concession to His Excellency general Ranza of necessary war means from he thought, showing at the same time the opportunity that some fighter and bomber squadron gives more of then previewed it comes put to the disposition of the same general for only the first days of hostility (...) ⁽⁵⁷⁾.

From Athens, Minister Grazzi had sent to Ciano, 3 October, a long telegram ⁽⁵⁸⁾, that for order of Mussolini was sent to Badoglio in date 7 October, in which the Greek panorama was painted therefore well that the affirmations made to the meeting of the 15th remain incomprehensible:

"(...) Also making part due to exaggeration of informers, it is outside doubts, or that Greece has under arms approximately 250,000 men, for the greater part already deployed to the frontiers (...).

From this concentration (...) and from public spirit he would have themselves to be deduce that the Government of Metaxas will try to reject to every invasion attempt and that it will not be possible to obtain territorial cessions from it without use of the force, strategic consent to occupation of zones or points and concrete actions of adhesion of Greece to the Axis (...).

(...)Government of Metaxas has been placed by the same in the impossibility of retreating, without to ever place against if not only English and Turkish but same public opinion in which the wind blows extremism nationalist never until now seen (...).

56) Ministero degli Esteri, *op. cit.*, doc n. 755

57) Ibid., doc. n. 764,

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

President Metaxas has never had behind him therefore total unanimity of consents."
(...)⁽⁵⁹⁾

On 23 October, Col. Mondini arrived from the ambassador, v ery worried. According to a colleague in passage to the airport of Tatoi under orders for Rhodes "he had been decided a military action against Greece that would have had beginning in a day not still fixed, to begin from successive Saturday 26th" ⁽⁶⁰⁾. The officer had reassumed how much had been discussed in the sitting about 15 October with an equipment of collected comments evidently in the atmosphere of the General Staff. In short, the idea was born and supported for a long time in political circles and General Staffs, always hostile to the enterprise, they preferred a decisive operation in any case, that is total, but than it involved the shipment of other divisions and at least a pair in a month of time. For against Gen. Visconti Prasca, supported by Gen. Soddu, had supported to have sufficient forces for the reduced plan (Epiro-Corfù) and Mussolini, after to have at first said to the General Staff to study the issue well, had then abruptly decided to put into effect without delay the reduced plan. The decision was due to the fact that Greek exponents had been bribed.

Grazzi and Mondini remained fearful, because, having nothing to do with any taken decision, they were not only unaware of the imminent future, but could exclude any "work" carried out in Greece to favor of our initiative. Grazzi commented:

"In conclusion: or no work political-military was made in Greece, or, if it were made, it was entrusted persons who narrated the false and to which, in a matter of much gravity, a faith that was not justified, with a seriousness was lend that would be inadmissible if instead that a war had been dealt to organize a Sunday out in the country"⁽⁶¹⁾.

Circa the last days of peace to Athens is sent back told much from our representatives in Greece in the cited works.

58) Ibid. doc. n. 667.

59) To mid November undersecretary Benini had to admit with minister Grazzi and Col. Mondini, returned from *Athens* after the war declaration, than there was "*clearly dispute between the reports coming from Athens that were called black and, those that came from Albania that were called white* ", the exception made for the S.I.M. of Tirana That agreed with Athens (Cfr. L. MONDINI, op. cit., pag. 258).

60) L. MONDINI, op. cit., pag. 226 and E. GRAZZI, op. cit., pag. 228.

61) E. GRAZZI, op. cit., pag. 223.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The ultimatum was delivered at 03:00 of 28 October 62. The surprise, naturally relative, of Metaxas was little more to that of the Italian chiefs of General Staff:

"From the English radio - Armellini annotated - we know of the presentation of a ultimatum to Greece, that has rejected it, ordering instead the general mobilization and asking assistance from England (...). Not only Badoglio, but not even Cavagnari and Pricolo, Undersecretaries and Chiefs of the General Staffs of the respective Armed Forces, approvals this morning, none knew "⁽⁶³⁾.

Also the allied was taken flat footed. That the issue of Rumania had strongly hit Mussolini had not evidently escaped Ambassador von Mackensen or the military attaché, Gen. von Rintelen. Therefore as the first one had understood very well the guidelines of those who were close to Mussolini:

"Powerful forces enclosed Count Ciano - communicated to Ribbentrop 18 October - are working in order to reach a solution on the Italian-Greek problem. From coming from information of reliable source it turns out that Count Ciano, in order to accelerate the issue, has convened in Rome the governor and, the commander of the Italian forces in Albania, in order to listen to their points of view. Both, are known to Palazzo Chigi, are for the action ".

The day after, to good account, von Mackensen requested and obtained a reception from Ciano. He wanted to touch base; since arrived word that the hostilities would be begun on the 23rd, with object Athens and Salonicco. Ciano was evasive and the ambassador then proposed asked the minister of Foreign countries to speak openly to the Italian government what was its precise intentions. But Hitler, decidedly contrary to the enterprise, reserved himself of dealing, what personally with Mussolini after the already programmed talks with Petain and Franco.

In fact the evening on the 24th Ribbentrop telephoned Ciano from France, telling him "*also of the next trip of Hitler to a city of upper Italy in order to confer with the Duce*".⁽⁶⁴⁾ and, the successive day, proposed the encounter at Florence for 28 October. Only the evening of the 27th, at 21:00, Ciano convened the person in charge of transactions Count Bismarck to tell him that at three of the next day it would have been delivered the *ultimatum* to Metaxas and that, in any case officially, at six would be begun the invasion. To Berlin

62) Ministry of Foreign countries, op. cit., doc. n. 789 - attachment n. 4.

63) Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., pag. 128-129. Cfr. also "*Processo Graziani*", vol. 1, pag. 133.

64) G. CIANO, op. cit., pag. 473.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the news arrived rather in vague way, to raise many thousand doubts:

"The objectives of the operation: the occupation of Corfù, the movement on Gianina and the penetration until the gulf of Patrasso, the occupation first of the islands of Itaca, Cefalonia, Zante let alone the prosecution on Athens and Salonicco. Command entrusted to the commander of the XXVI Army Corps, General Visconti Prasca. Since of the nine divisions located in Albania, two turn out engaged for the defense of the Yugoslavian border, the superiority of forces could be, in the case of serious opposition from Greek part, not adapted to the requirements of a quick success"⁽⁶⁵⁾:

But the point on which the German attention had been stopped was Crete. According to Keitel an Italian military action against Greece, especially if pushed until Pireo, would sure have carried to the occupation of Crete from the British part and this would have constituted a constant threat for the communications between Italy and Libya. An Italian operation of surprise against the island would have been possible - in German judgment - but with the employment of all the fleet, that it involved the preliminary weakening of the English Fleet and its bottling at Alexandria. However the hypothesis was collapsed because resolutely rejected by Roatta in a conversation with von Rintelen. Berlin therefore remained in attended of the events with attitude of cold separation.

65 The war diary of the OKW, dated 30 October.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

CHAPTER III
THE THEATER OF OPERATIONS

1. BOUNDARY AND ORGANIZATION.

The Greek-Albanian theater operations can be delimited from the following alignments: to the north, Durazzo-Tirana-Dibra-Prilep; to the east, Prilep-Bitolj (Monastir)-Florina-Kozane- Volo; to the south, Volo-Arta; to the west from the Ionian and Adriatic seas. It has therefore an amplitude of approximately 180 km of width for 250 km of length and comprises central and southern Albania, the Epiro, the south-western Macedonian and the northern Tessaglia.

Dealing with a mountainous zone, with a rather complex orographical structure, correspondent to messy tectonic dynamics from which it has its origin. The mountainous conformation stretches to divide all the area in multiple compartments, yes from being able to say only generically that the course of the facilitation lines runs from the north-west to south-east.

WARNING - the spelling of the geographic names often appears different in the topographic scale maps various used (for ex. Corovodë, Cerovodë e Cerevoda; Qarishta and Kjarista; Kulmakës and Glumakes; Qafë, Qafa, Chiafa, Chiaf, Ciafa = hill, pass, especially if derived from the locality located in the regions of frontier (for ex. Korça and Koritsa; Kapestica and Kapestitsa). In documents of the era, then; large are the arbitrary deformations derived from attempt, not always justified, of simplification (for ex. Koriza and Corizza rather than Korça; Tomorezza anziche Tomorrecës; Desnizes and Desnizza rather than Deshnicës).

On the whole the criterion has been followed to employ in the text the corrected spelling, leaving unchanged that one brought back in official documents. Sometimes, instead, for facility of understanding, it has been used the generalized denomination, even if improper (for ex. Chiaf Chiciocut rather than Qafë Kijokut

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

2. THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION.

The net of the street communications in Albania (sketch n. 3) was introduced as a very poor one, although the rhythm for improvement of the roads over seen from the Albania Roads Company constituted in 1939. In kind the roadways followed the course of the rivers, with the consequence that in plain sufficient possibility of movement offered, while, just as they were not advanced into the zones mounts some, the worsening became obvious: winding tracing, curves many tightening, strong slopes, limited width of the street center very rarely allowing the employment of trucks with trailers and rendered totally impossible double transit of convoys.

The surface of the roads was generally natural, least the features asphalts, however very irregularly maintenance. Also the outflow from the ports of Durazzo, Valona and Santi Quaranta left much to be desired and the traffic jams they were taken place nearly immediately when the traffic exceeded the normal level of peacetime. The main arteries were two. The first one headed towards the western Macedonian, along furrows of the Skumbini and the Upper Devoli, with the roadway Elbasan - Korça - Florina/Kastoria.

The second one comprised three roadways: the Berat – Klisura - P.te Perati - along Kalibaki - Gianina the furrow of the Vojussa; the Valona - Tepeleni – Argirocastro – Kakavia – Kalibaki - Gianina, along the furrow of the Dhrinos; the Valona - Himara - Santi Quaranta - Konispoli.

The four roads were connected between of them from arroccamenti to roadway of the border with Greece and to the shelter of the line of mountains: Korça – Ersekë – Leskovi - P.te Perati, immediately to the West of the Morova - Grammos group; P.te Perati – Kalibaki - Kakavia, in truth confluence of the two roadways from Berat and Valona to Kalibaki, on the Kalamas, and Jerguçat – Delvino - Santi Quaranta for the pass of Murzines, to north of the Olatevun, connecting the origins from Valona. The very best of the previous ones was the Durazzo - Tirana, call a freeway but in effects simply a good roadway - two way. The rich net of the muleteers and the paths in the mountain zones.

No railway lines.

In short only the cramped Durazzo -Tirana semicircle – Elbasan – Berat - Valona offered in its spacious satisfactory practicability. But its importance extended the local aspect by far. It is in correspondence of this plain of short breath, in fact, that the Adriatic coast completes an inflection and it does not find, like in

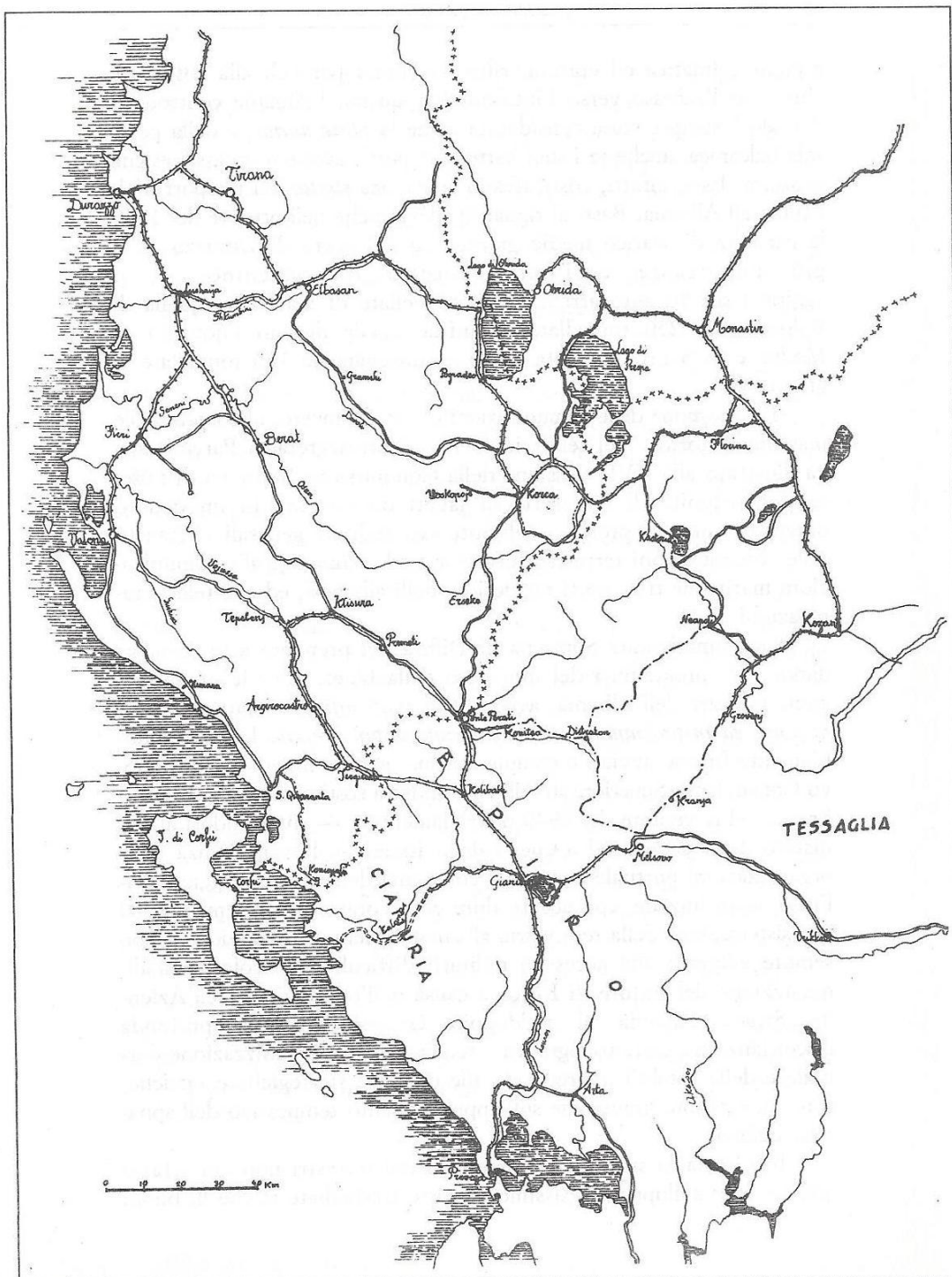
The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

The street situation of the theater on 28.10.1940

Schizzo n. 3

LA SITUAZIONE STRADALE NELLO SCACCHIERE GRECO-ALBANESE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Dalmatia and Epirota regions, highlight mountains parallels to the coast that close the access towards the inside. For this center-western Albania always has been considered as the *Adriatic door* of the Balkan peninsula, even if its break, the ports, had a very meager ability. They, in fact, constituted the classic *bottleneck* of the transports from Italy to Albania. Heavy burdened with regard to finding that in the October of 1940 the ability to every day medium drainage of the port of Durazzo - the more supplied important and the only one of docks - was about 50 trucks and 1,000 tons of material; that one of Valona with the 250 tons and finally those of San Giovanni di Medua and Santi Quaranta did not catch up the 150 tons per day.

The issue of the communications had been, in truth, faced from the maximum authorities. In February 1940, Undersecretary Pariani had illustrated to the XVII Session of the Supreme Defense Committee the opportunity of a series of work to execute in an organic picture, under the profile of the military interests generally and reported to the land communications (railway and ordinary), to the marine communications between the Puglisi ports and those Albanians, and to the telecommunications.

The Supreme Defense Committee in taking action, agreeing, of the program of the ministry of the War for the military organization of Albania, had made "*voted so that the provisions in course and program are realized very soon*". Work undoubtedly was started and completed, but when Gen. Soddu, new Comandante Superiore in Albania, replacing Gen. Visconti Prasca in November of 1940 will have to complain - addressing to the ministry of the War and to that one of Foreign countries - the insufficiency of the harbor and street organizations as one of the greater causes of the beginning failure, with hard and deeply wounded accusations: relative programs to the systems of Albanian road network of slow realization and not always adherent to the military necessities; particular difficulties in the feeding of the field of Korça because of the opposition of the Albania Company Roads to the Gramshi - Nikolare doubling; deep discord between topographical map and street truth; harbor organization and of the roadways unprepared to the strategic and tactical requirements, with the most serious repercussions on the timely preparation of the apparatus of war.

In Greece the state of the land communications was not at all better. The most extensive development of rich jagged coasts of good

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

landings place and the sour inner territory induced to give to the preference to the connections via sea regarding that land way, laborious and expensive. The only important railroad, but to a single railway, was that one that gives Athens went back then to Larissa and Salonicco, continuing towards Skoplje and Istanbul. At Salonicco the section for Farina - Bitolj in the western Macedonian was grafted.

For how much it has drawn to the street net, an only important artery, the Athens - Salonicco existed, in highly summarized improved part with asphalt thrown by hand on the preexistent paving - it arranges rather common - for which the surface was introduced rich of wrinkledness and holes because of the reaction of the mantle asphalted to the summer heat. Null, in practice, the maintenance. The Epiro, separated from Macedonian and the Tessaglia from impervious chain of the Pindo, could be considered completely isolated. A single road, mediocre, joined it to Albania: the Berat/Valona - Kalibaki - Gianina - Arta. The Gianina - Trikkala - Larissa connection was moreover under construction that advanced, through the pass of Metsovo, constituted the only one directed connection between Epiro and Tessaglia; connection opened to traffic a little before the conflict for how much an incomplete anchor. Where tasks that the Tessaglia can be considered the heart of Greece - it, in fact, cover the vital Attica with Athens, Pireo and all the center of the nation and represent the great reduction from which it is possible launch itself against the invader - will be easy to comprise the existence of a remarkable favorable current Greek to maintain the isolation of the Epiro, just in relation to the origins from Albania.

Altogether the characteristics of the street net in a natural atmosphere of for if difficult, were such to render any movement of troops slow and laborious. One not only joins to that the long duration of the season of rains and the rigidity of the winter for having a meaningful picture of the difficulties of movement but also of simple parking. Heavy burdened to emphasize that in order to cover the distance between Durazzo and the Greek border (approximately 300 kilometers), in the autumn of the 1940 the convoys employed in kind three days, so that the round trip all together seven good days: three for the going, three for the return and one for the rest and the maintenance. Naturally having nothing to do with the usury of the motor vehicles and the thousand unforeseen events of the war.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

3. THE OPERATING POSSIBILITIES.

Sights in the comparisons of Greece, the operating possibilities from Albania have an unique origin: the semicircle supported by the sea, Durazzo – Elbasan – Berat - Valo. From it departed two guiding operating eccentrics: Macedonian - Thessalian and Epirusan (sketch n. 4).

The first, from the Korçano it heads decidedly for Macedonian, to the port of Salonicco, and, according to need, it comes down towards south until to Athens - Pireo. Salonicco did not constitute a determining objective but it was the port through which Great Britain could have quickly sent reinforcements to the Greek army; moreover, it provoked reflected on first plan on the possible participation of Bulgaria. Tessaglia instead was, as has been said, most important and to reach Larissa meant to cut outside the forces coming from Macedonian on one side and of Thrace, and that one of the Epirus from the other.

Without to come down in a detailed analysis and held account of the possibilities of operating development of the director, let alone of the fact that in correspondence to it would sure have gravitated the bulk of the Greek army, it was easy to calculate that the long action of it would have demanded a remarkable consistency for the feeding of the effort in depth and the safety on the flanks.

The Epirusan direction allowed the acquisition of all the Epirus until to Arta - Preveza. Further developments could be estimated for according to time, very distinguished, both towards Missolungi and towards Athens. It was served from only one roadway.

The directions Macedonian and Epiroan substantially stretched to achieve a circumscribed scope; that Thessalian, closely connected with the Macedonian, aimed at the occupation of all of Greece or nearly. Between the Thessalian and the Epirusan possibility of competition, but not indispensable: the connection existed between them through the Pindo, in fact, was not jeopardizing an action that was intended to only be interested in the Epirus. The closing of the pass of Metsovo, front to the east or front to the west according to who had taken the decision, would have isolated the Epirus.

After all, the range of the possibilities appeared varied:

contemporary offensive on all the directions: maximum engagement of forces, the maximum scope;

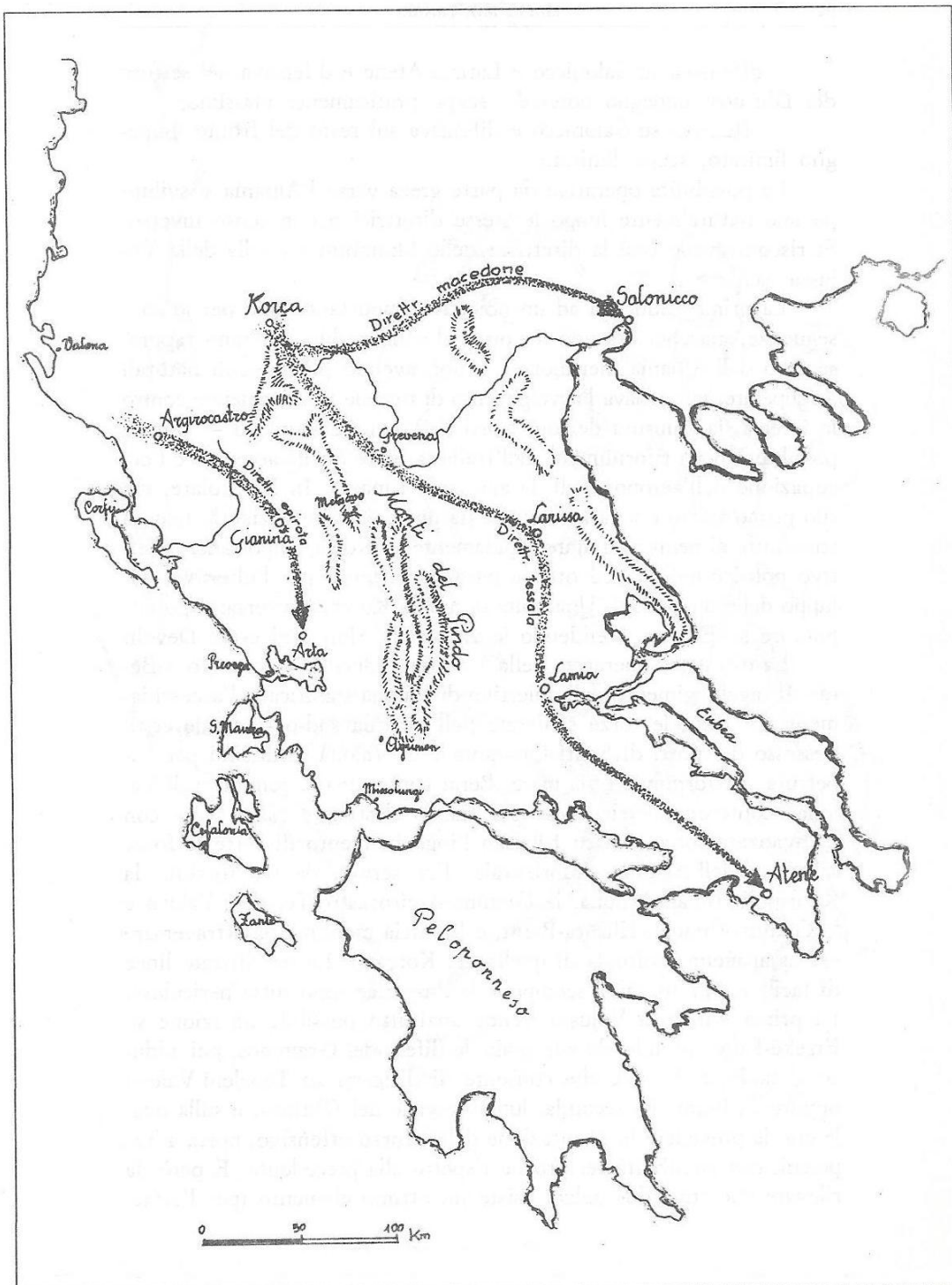
offensive on Gianina-Arta and defensive in the Korçano area: limited engagement, limited scope;

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The direction of operations from Albania to Greece

Schizzo n. 4

LE DIRETTRICI OPERATIVE DALL'ALBANIA ALLA GRECIA



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

offensive on Salonicco and Larissa-Athens and defensive in the field of the Dhrinos: considerable engagement, the practically maximum scope;
 offensive on Salonicco and defensive on the rest of the front: limited engagement, limited scope.

The operating possibilities from Greek part towards Albania were developed naturally along same the guidelines but in the inverse sense. The direction of Skumbini and that one of Vojsa found themselves therefore (sketch n. 5).

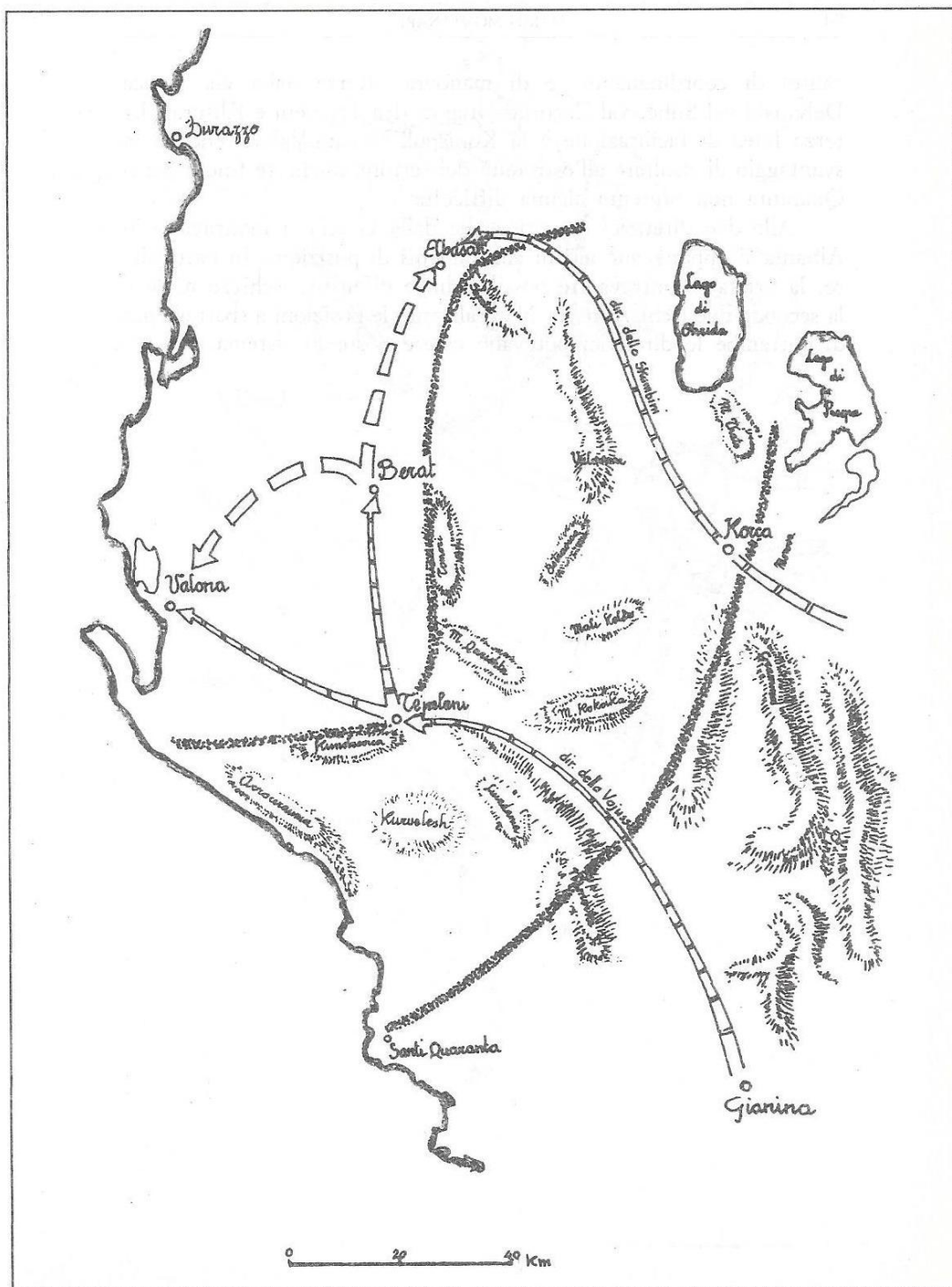
The first adduced to the most important objective for the consequences, since, being to the north of the semicircle mount represented from southern Albania and not having more natural obstacles to exceed, threatened the winding of all the forces deployed against Greece, the closing of the two ports of Valona and Durazzo - only possibilities for supplying from Italy, in part those by airplane - and the occupation of the airport of Tirana, remained alone. In particular, in its first feature it was characterized from an elevated potentiality, such to concur with the enemy to act quickly on Korça, important political-military objective and optimal line of departure for the further development of operations. Once occupied Korça, the adversary could head at Elbasan coming down the valleys of Skumbini and Devoli.

The operating direction of Vojsa adduces to Valona and/or Berat. The attainment of the objective of Valona meant the encirclement of all the forces deployed in south-western Albania and the possession of the ports of Santi Quaranta and of Valona, useful for the opening to the supply via sea. Berat allowed the conquest of Valona, conferring the safety on the right flank, and threatened with the above advance successive on Elbasan to shut in all of the forces deployed of Southeastern Albania. It was served from three roadways: the Konispoli – Himara – Valona, la Gianina – Argirocastro - Tepeleni - Valona and the Gianina – Premeti – Klisura - Berat, and wrap the mountains to cross were much less deep than that one of the Korçano. The three distinguished lines of facilitation in which the director breaks down itself are all dangerous ones. The first, along the Vojsa, first of all renders an action possible on Erseke - Korça taking to the flank the defense of the Grammos, then it adduces to the node of Klisura that concurs to head on Tepeleni - Valona or Berat. The second one, along the valley of Dhrinos, and on which it was from previewing the gravitation of the offensive effort, door to Tepeleni, with mutual possibilities regarding the previous one. And but to find that between the two it furrows an optimal element (for the forward exists)

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

The direction of operations from Greece to Albania

LE DIRETTIVE OPERATIVE DALLA GRECIA ALL'ALBANIA



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

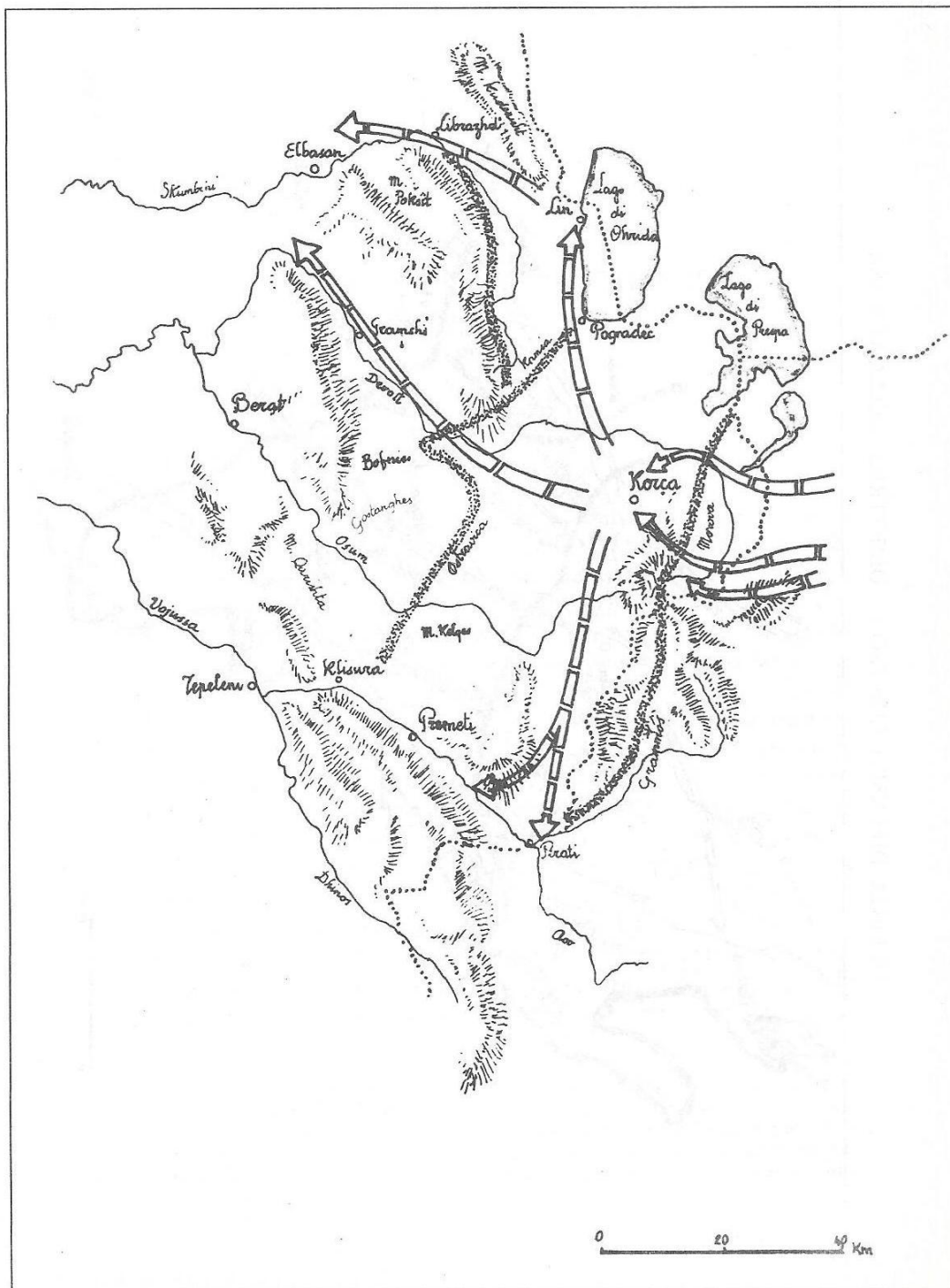
of coordination and maneuver offered from the tactical way Delvinaki-val Suhes-Val Zagorias - Dragoti (between Tepeleni and Klisura). The third line of facilitation is the Konispoli – Himara - Valona that has the disadvantage to turn out to the extremity of the field, even if until Santi Quaranta does not introduce some difficulty.

To two guiding operating that they give Greece they were advanced in, Albania opposed some alignments of positions. In particular, the first met three possible defensive lines (sketch n. 6) and second two (sketch n. 7). Naturally the obstruction positions of both the guidelines could be placed in system.

Defensive Lines against the direction of operations of the Skumbini

Schizzo n. 6

LE LINEE DIFENSIVE CONTRO LE DIRETTRICE DELLO SKUMBINI

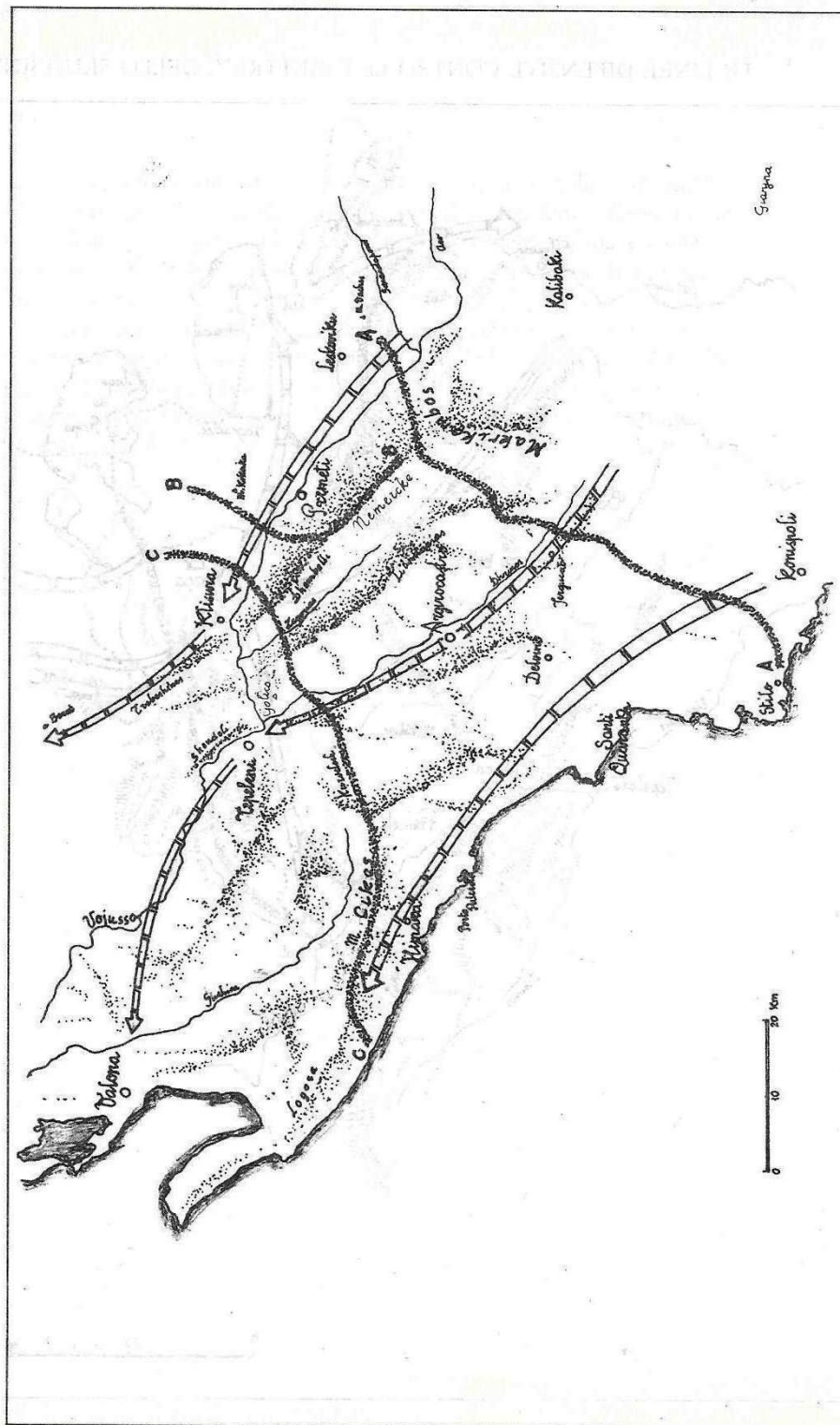


The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Defensive Lines against the direction of operations of Vojussa

Schizzo n. 7

LE LINEE DIFENSIVE CONTRO LA DIRETTRICE DELLA VOJUSSA



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Chapter IV

ITALIAN OPERATIONS PLAN

1. THE GUZZONI - PARIANES PLAN (1939).

The Guzzoni - Pariani plan, as it has been said previously, finds origin in a memo written by Gen. Guzzoni, examined and discussed in August 1939 in a meeting presided by Gen. Pariani⁽¹⁾, and subsequently (the end of 1939) confirmed by Gen. Geloso, new Comandante Superiore of Albania. It, compiled under the form of the "directives for the Albanian theater of operations"⁽²⁾, proposed two goals: to cut off Greece from the rest of the Balkans with the cutting of Albania - Salonicco (main), and to occupy Corfù, and possibly the Jonie islands, in order to inhibit to England the use of the bases that for them was easy to prepare (secondary). The concept of an offensive action in mass in the Macedonian theater with wide competition of aviation some derived and a concomitant action of rectifies in Epirus in order to improve the conditions of the defense, deployment to the frontier Yugoslavian, troops of cover.

It was considered presupposed *indispensable* the preparation in zone of assembled (Albania), *from the beginning* of the operations, sufficient forces in order to allow the timely feeding of the effort from the outlet beyond frontier with the attainment of the objective (Salonicco).

1) The memo of Guzzoni contemplated also the defensive problem. With regard to, the defense in the Macedonian area would have had to lean itself to the positions of the Suhagora-Morova, particularly suitable to resist an attack coming the east, and for his a pair of divisions would have been necessary. Pariani on this point did not find of agreement, considered sufficient in such field two battalions, consideration that, for his personal conviction, thereby the Greeks would not ever have attacked.

2) DSCSTA, 23/8/1939.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The theater of operations was subdivided in four distinguished theaters (sketch n. 8.). In the Macedonian, where it was believed could act to the maximum nine or ten Greek divisions, of which to beginning only four of infantry and one of cavalry, the operation had to assume a character of rapidity and violence in order to sweep up at once the border defense, to exceed the mountain obstacle quickly preventing the enemy to organize themselves and to reach very soon Salonicco. The effort was previewed along two guide lines: Florina – Edessa - Salonicco, to the north, with two army corps, constituted of one Armored Div., two airborne Div. and three Inf. Div., one of which being Camicie Nere; Kastoria - Verria - f. Vardar to the south with a Corps with three Inf. Div., of which one of Camicie Nere. The operating troops on the second director had the task to go around the Smerdeke pass (threshold of Kapestica), first objective of the main column. A fourth Corps had initially to be kept in the basin of Korça for feeding the action.

In the Epirus theater one simply agreed to improve the defensive possibilities on the frontier. Therefore a army Corps with two alpine Divs. and a regiment⁽³⁾ appeared sufficient in order to push themselves until to the Kalamas, along the direction of Gianina. The Greek opposition would not have exceeded presumably two - three divisions, of which immediately the 8th Inf. Div. of Gianina reinforced.

In the theater to the Jonico Island the objective was Corfù in order to prevent the English fleet to take advantage of it. Such task was entrusted to one Inf. Div. reinforced by the S. Marco battalion, sufficient in order to have reason of the garrison of the island estimated as four battalions and three batteries. Finally, in the Yugoslavian theater a agreement to guarantee the safety of Albania against eventual offenses, by means of elements of the frontier and three Inf. Div. reinforced of which one for reserve. The main zones to defend were Scutari, Kukes, high valleys of Drin and Korça. However, resistance to the bitter end on the line Miloti - Librazhd extended to south until covering the basin of Korça.

In short, the plan previewed to meet and to eliminate along main the operating director adducing to Salonicco the mass of the enemy forces. That achieved, the occupation of the rest of the Ellade became issue of easy definition. Pariani sent to Badoglio, the study, indicated as *plan for the requirement O.M.G.*, united to other *plan for the requirement E.f.* (Yugoslavia), limiting themselves naturally to the general lines but furnishing all with a "*memo with*

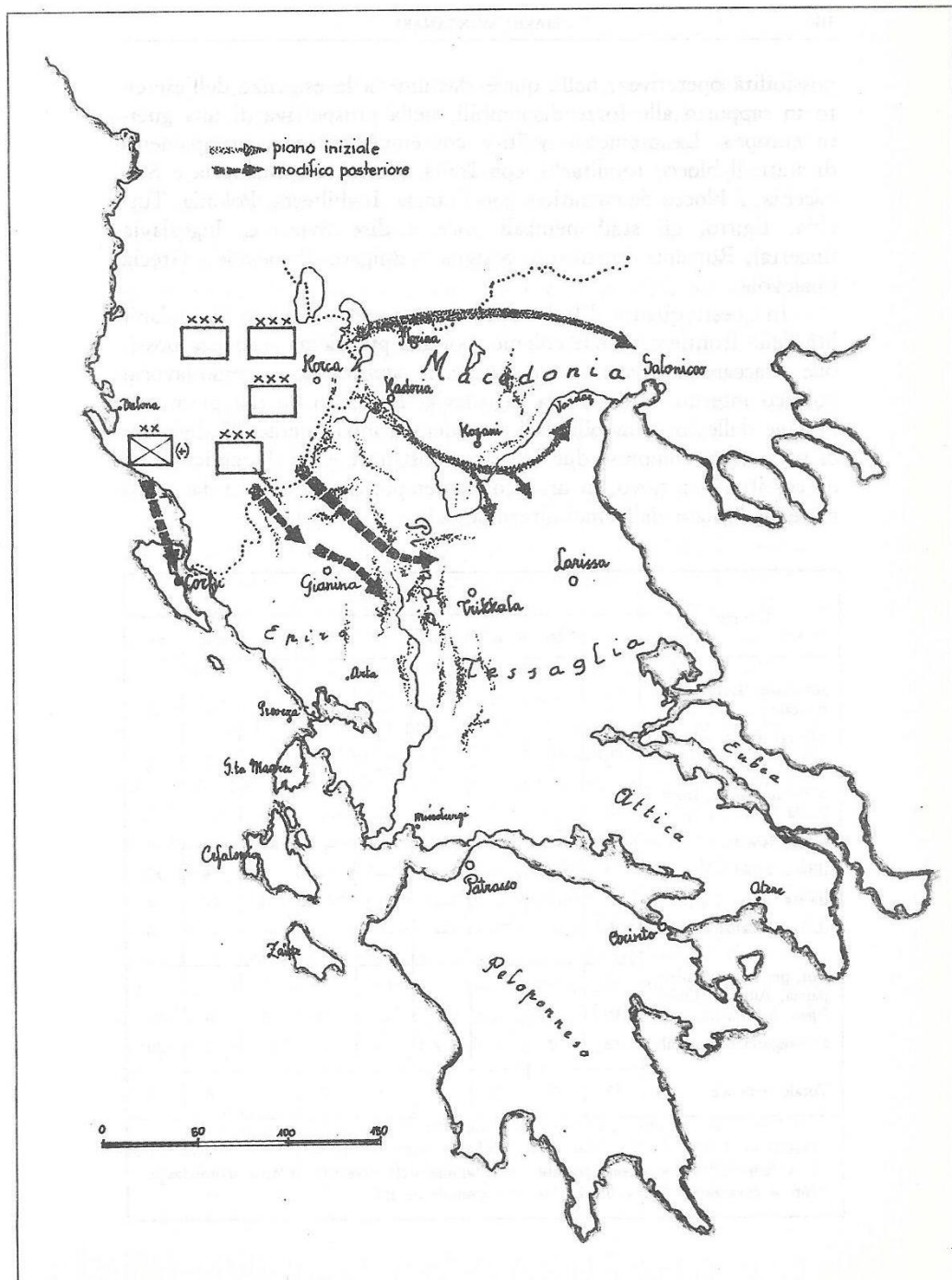
(3) The Inf. Div. initially proposed by Gen. Guzzoni was removed as reserve.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

The plan of Guzzoni-Pariani (1939)

Schizzo n. 8

IL PIANO GUZZONI-PARIANI (1939)



The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

operating possibilities", in which it reassumed the requirements of the army in connection with the forces available, in the perspective of a European war. The political premise contemplated three groupings of states: the totalitarian block, with Italy, Germany, Hungary and Slovakia; the democratic block, with France, England, Poland, Turkey, Egypt; the neutral states, are worth to say Switzerland, Yugoslavia (uncertain), Rumania (forced), Spain and Bulgaria (benevolent), Greece (malevolent).

In this picture, Italy had first of all to assure the inviolability of the frontiers and the colonies, then to the nearest expiration possible to attack Greece, *situation finally allowing* and before intense inner political activity, to attack Yugoslavia. Leaving from such premises, the examination of the forces mobilized considered initially 72 divisions of varied type, including two Inf. Div. to reconstitute and six of Camicie Nere to constitute from the beginning; in according to time, that is to start from the third month from the beginning of the mobilization, another 15 divisions.

Tasks	Divisions								
	Inf.	At.I.	Mt.	M.I.	Cav.	Arm.	Lib.	CC.NN	Total
Deployed,. Western front.	15		3						18
Watching Swiss front.	1								1
Reserve West front.	4								4
Deployed Juliana front security.	4	1	1						6
defense Islands	4								4
defense Libya	2	4					2	4	12
defense Aegean	1								1
defense Albania	4		1			1			6
Tot. for defense Motherland, Albania, Libya, Aegean	35	5	5			1	2	4	52
Remaining available	10	2		2	3	1		2	20
Grand Total	45	7	5	2	3	2	2	6	72
Notes: Inf. = Infantry; At.I = Semi-motorized; Mt = Alpine; Cav. = Cavalry; M.I. == motorized; Arm. = Armored; Lib. = Libyan; CC.NN. = Camicie Nere									

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

- Considered self-sufficient the A.O.I., the comparison between requirements and possibility offers the situation of which to the chart in the previous page. Now, if requirement O.M.G. demanded the employment of 18 divisions, achieved some that the 12 divisions to add to the 6 already located in Albania had to be removed from divisions available (twenty), than therefore they were reduced to 8. For an offensive action against Yugoslavia, after all would be remained the 6 already deployed for the safety of the Julia frontier, plus the 8 available for a total of 14 binary divisions. Held account that the Yugoslavia could decide to Italian frontier at least 7-8 divisions deployed, let alone of another 7-8 in general reserve - on its total 32 ternary ones was clearly that a true and own offensive war against our neighbor became impossible, less than political movements insides (Croatian and Macedonian issues) had not assured favorable conditions therefore to make to assume to the enterprise a character not of conquest but of simple occupation, upon request or in aid to movements favorable to us. In case, then, the political situation had imposed the foretold offensive war, it excluded that this could come from us without lead the German competition (6 divisions) and Hungarian (3 divisions) or, in alternative, without the 12 divisions of previewed use for requirement O.M.G. (to which therefore it had to renounce).

As far as the cooperation with the other Armed Forces, some difficulties, not serious existed for the Aeronautics but sensitive for the Navy. First it represented that the only Albanian airport of sure confidence was that one of Tirana, because the field of Valona not always turned out usable in case of bad weather and that one of Korça was suitable only for small aircraft. Consequently the greater part of the participations had to leave from the Puglie and, in last analysis, the timeliness and the adhesion to the progression of the troops would have been in some circumstance sacrificed⁽⁴⁾. The Navy was revealed substantially hostile to the plan. First of all it declared not to be in a position to joining at the same time to the requirements of Libya and the Aegean, let alone to those of Albania and the Jonie islands, and, having to choose, the same directives of Mussolini prescribed of giving the

4) In the meeting of August '39 had been dealt with also the competition of aviation of bombing, that at first the impossibility would have had to be particularly intense given at the start for them to act as the artilleries of heavy caliber. To the demand for Guzzoni, Soddu specified a little more than the 700 front line aircraft in that moment available (testimony of the gen. Guzzoni).

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

precedence to the transports for the Libya and Aegean. Moreover had to resign to the impossibility to escort convoys of heavy materials during the war, therefore it became necessary to amass all this material in the A.S. before the beginning of the conflict. It observed also that in order to carry to Albania the divisions of reinforcements it was necessary nearly a month.

"In conclusion - Pariani commented - All it can be predisposed defensive action for the western. For the offensive actions to east it is necessary:

- a) in order to put into effect them both, than is facilitations, which:
 - for Greece: Bulgarian pressure against Greece and dispersion of defense due to our demonstrative actions;
- b) the two operations would have be conducted subsequently for with finding us everywhere engaged without having a general reserve;
- c) in case the aforesaid favorable conditions are not taken place, would have to be logically reduced to a single operations, ready to put into effect the other where the conduct did not determine that usury that, in way of fair appraisal, it must be calculated ".

These main features of operation O.M.G. According to Guzzoni the preparation of the offensive demanded approximately a years time and therefore the action could not have had beginning before May-June 1940, obviously beginning immediately the realization of the necessary provisions. The period was put essentially to profit under the most important aspect and conditioning the movements, both sea and land: that one of the jobs. Guzzoni also had asked, with regard to, the Comandante Superiore of Albania had the faculty to take part in matter of ways of communications activity of relevance of the ministry of the Albanian Publics Works, under a form of control and supervision of the undersecretary for the Albanian Transactions of Rome - so that the realization of the public works was in tightened correlation with the military requirements, he was dealt to upgrade the ports of Durazzo, Valona and Santi Quaranta; to construct a net of depots of Intendancy in order to allow storing of such supplies not to make to reflect on the refueling ordinary eventual unexpected crises in the marine transports; to realize new tracks of flight, systems and airport depots; to increase and to asphalt all the main roads that give the ports of Albania adduced to the Greek frontier; to attribute a particular importance to the road net of the Korçano area, from which they would have had to leave a good four army corps and from which it was necessary to feed the twelve divisions that had to head at Salonicco. Especially the construction of the road (Elbasan) – Gramshi - Korça was demanded, to

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

double the Lin- Podradec feature, insufficient because only way of supply and evacuation and in addition to untied roadway of the Yugoslavian border.

The plan was slightly modified, later by Pariani. A division⁽⁵⁾ was added to the army corps with the Epirus, whose task was not more than to attest itself at the Kalamas in order to improve the conditions of the defense but for occupying Gianina and for reaching the pass of Metsovo, in order to make sure the Perati - Leskoviku- Ersekë- Korça against the possible Greek aiming from the Pindo; of guaranteeing itself, with the possession of the node of Kalibaki, the availability of another channel of feeding (Santi Quaranta - Kalibaki- Ersekë - Korça that one of the Macedonian front in the 1st World War); and to confer safety to the right flank of the southern director on Salonicco.

A second division, moreover, was added for the conquest of the Jonie islands, carrying therefore the total to 20 divisions. To notice that, according to Geloso, the time being necessary for the transport from Italy to Albania of the divisions of reinforcements could be compressed to three months approximately.

2. THE GELOSO PLAN (AUGUST 1940).

The Geloso plan finds its origin in the conversation of 22 May 1940 between Ciano and the Gen. Geloso, that it provoked after a pair of weeks the substitution of this last one with the Gen. Visconti Prasca. The idea was of pure political character, indeed pseudo politico could be said because - the annexation of the *unredeemed* Ciamuria - calmly was left to fall after the occupation of Greece and none of those people, Italian and Albanian, that a lot they were agitated before the conflict had the mind to ask that the patriotic feelings of the Ciamurian population finally be satisfied joining the region to Albania. In any case understanding came entrusted to Geloso the task to study the possibility of an action of depth limited to occupy the Epirus, the Acarnania until Missolungi and the Jonie islands in order to prevent to the English fleet to use Greek bases to north of the gulf of Patrasso, also, it was specified that the premise political inalienable of this military initiative was to take place itself of one of the

⁵ Like in the original thought of Gen. Guzzoni.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

following circumstances: Greece consent, is also unwillingly, to our invasion; or Greece not consent but unable to more defend the Epirus with than three divisions, being been all the other ones bound to the Macedonian frontier from the threatening or quite enemy attitude of Bulgaria, situation that had been taken place in 1939.

Main elements of the plan can themselves therefore be reassumed (sketch n. 9): organized the cover to the Yugoslavian and Macedonian frontiers, the operation must have characteristics of particular rapidity and incisiveness, so as to be able to overwhelm of overwhelm the frontier units, 8th Inf. Div. and any other mobilization on the place, leaving little time to it for the participation of unit from the Attica and the Peloponnese. Therefore ten divisions were estimated necessary altogether and a fast group. The Epirus Field: a Corps with three divisions in 1st line and one in the 2nd line, with the aid of a quick group (two regiments of cavalry and one grenadiers) on the right; in the Macedonian area: two divisions between Pogradec and Ersekë; Yugoslavian area, a body with two divisions; for Corfù and the islands, one division; in reserve, one division.

Presupposed political to part, the resolution of the plan rested on the surprise and violence. On surprise, above all, because if organized with sufficient discretion the irruption in Epirus would have found in situated forces of limited entities, not completely mobilized and supported with a system of fieldworks on the land of insufficient consistency. On the violence, because the effort came exercised in a narrow field and because it appeared possible to lead the things so as to face and to exceed the Greek divisions in succession. The influx of further units was naturally realizable, but for the conditions of the street net and the land it was from thinking that, in the case, would be joints to consolidation carried out to the south of Gianina.

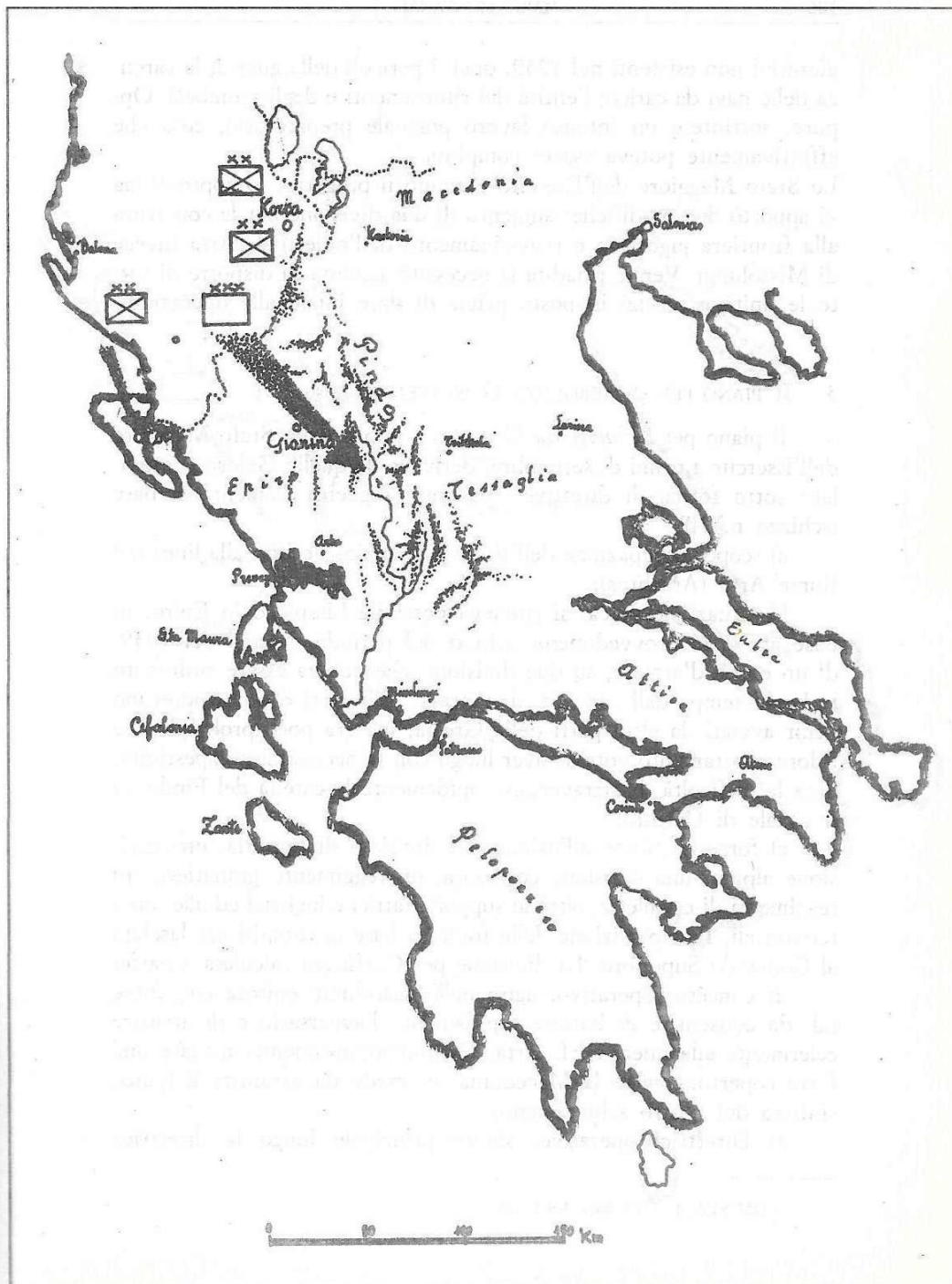
It could, however, to object that, it had where not been obtained the surprised due, the relationship of the forces could change in unfavorable sense we, finding ours 11-13 regiments (four binary divisions - five, calculating the reserve - and three regiments of support) first against 5-6 regiments (8th Inf. Div and mobilized division) and later 8 - 9 regiments (3rd Inf. Div.) eventually. And still an observation: it very astonishes to the esteem made from Geloso via the possibilities of transport in Albania, thinking sufficient 20-25 days in order to transfer from Italy the four divisions of reinforcements, beyond of course to the time being necessary for the movement from the ports of disembarkation to the border. It would seem to have diminished some elements gotten worse

The plan Geloso (August 1940)

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Schizzo n. 9

IL PIANO GELOSO (1940)



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

not existing in 1939, which the dangers of the war; the deficiency of cargo ships; the entity of the refueling and the evacuations. Or, imply an intense preparatory harbor work, which effectively could be completed.

The General Staff of the Army examined the plan, approved it but with two modifications: increase of one division for the cover to the Yugoslavian frontier and reconciliation of the objective, Arta instead of Missolongi. It confirmed the absolute necessity to arrange of all the units and services in place before the beginning of the operations.

3. THE PLAN FOR CONTINGENCY G (SEPTEMBER 1940).

The plan for Contingency G put to point from the General Staff of the Army first of September, derived from *those of Geloso*. Compiled under directives⁽⁶⁾ the form of sketch fixed the following base elements (n. 10):

- a) goal: occupation of the northern Epirus until the line of the Arta river (Arachtos);
- b) Greek situation: the employment in Epirus was thought possible, in base also to the provisions puts into effect in the period of crisis of 1939, of one army corps, with two divisions, that could be reinforced in short time by the 3rd Inf. Div. of Patrasso. Further others reinforcements could be started from departing from Greece, but it was little probable that their movement could have place with the necessary timeliness, given the difficulty to quickly cross the chain of the Pindo and the channel of Corinto;
- c) forces destined to the action: six divisions of infantry, one mountain division, one armored division, a regiment grenadiers, three regiments of cavalry, beyond to the tactical and logistic supports and the territorial units. The division of the forces based on the tasks was, left the Armed forces high command. The division for Corfù was a calculated part;
- d) the operating concept: to act in the Epirusan theater with such forces to allow to strike the adversary quickly and to arrive quickly to the line of the Arta river. At the same time, to put into effect a strong towards Macedonia, so as to guarantee the left flank of our alignment.
- e) Guiding operating: main effort along the director

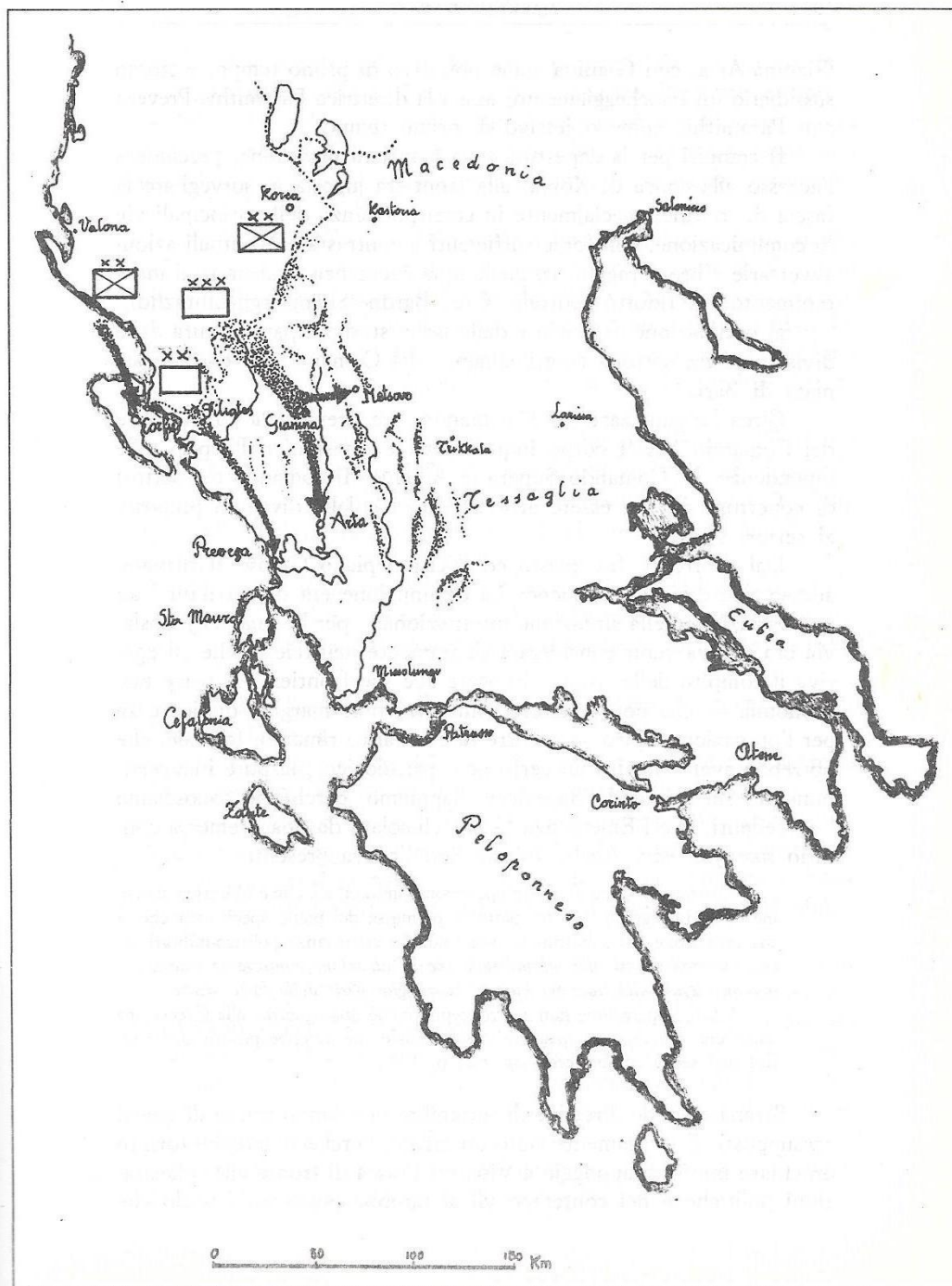
⁶⁾ DSCST A, f. 2101 dated 4.9.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The plan for the Contingency G of S.M.R.E. (Sept.. 1940)

Schizzo n. 10

IL PIANO EMERGENZA G DELLO S.M.R.E. (SETTEMBRE 1940)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Gianina-Arta, with Gianina as primary objective, and subsidiary effort (flanking) along the Paramithia-Preveza direction with Paramithia as primary objective.

f) tasks for the cover: to the Macedonian frontier, to preclude the access to the basin of Korça; to the Yugoslavian frontier, to watch the border strip, especially in correspondence of the main ways of communication, with sufficient forces to contrast eventual opposing actions for a short time. In any eventuality, to secure the maintenance of the central roadway (Guri Bardhe-Shengjergji-Librazhd);

g) the occupation of Corfù and the islands: studied in part under the care of the *Bari* division, under the coordination of Commander of the IX army corps of Bari.

Circa the command organization, was previewed the constitution of the XXVI Corps Command framing the divisions of the Epirus, under the command of Comando Superiore Albania. The command of the covering sectors had to be entrusted to one of the pre-located divisions of the same area.

From the comparison between this and cited Geloso plans the two divisions less are found now. The lessening was from attributing to a variation in the international situation, for which the Yugoslavia now could come considered as a sure neutral, which lightened the task of the troops located on its frontiers. To such part economy - that it could be used as safety margin for the Epirus operation - is necessary to make another observation, formal, that it could have covered a sure psychological weight, is also unnoticed, on the Armed forces high command. We know, because of it we know the previous ones, than the Contingency G was bound here from a premised condition *sine qua non*. Also Roatta had presented well:

"He was dealing with therefore, a limited operation, both as objective and as forces engaged. On the other hand the premise of the plan also specified that its performance was subordinated not only to the pointed out political-military circumstances, but to *impair the contingent situation however holding to the Bulgarian frontier the greater part of the Greek forces*.

Finally the operation was not conceived as a "war" on Greece, but as a simple precautionary occupation that could also have been carried out without to fight "(op. cit., p. 120).

Strangely the September directives do not make note of these presupposing. And surely by error, because a luminosity would have given a point of support to Visconti Prasca at the forefront to the political solicitations and in with a tempo would have placed a tie that

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

he could not have ignored. Instead the stipulated conditions, now implied, it will be always attenuated more until disappearing. Received the directives of the G.S. of the Army, Visconti Prasca started without delaying his studies, instructed the subordinate commanders to examine possibility and modality of employment of the respective units in relation to the following base elements (sketch n. 11).

In Epirus, the *Julia* Alpine Div. had to get hold of the passes to east of the node of Metsovo in order to prevent the Greek forces in Epirus escaping towards the east through the passes of the Pindo and putting themselves in conditions for shield eventual coming from enemy reactions from the Macedonia or Tessaglia. The action of the division along the chain of the Pindo was independent and without some interference with the Perati - Kalibaki – Gianina roadway.

The *Ferrara* Inf. Div. had to storm of force from the Dhrinos and Vojussa valleys in order to unblock the roadway of Kalibaki and to open the road to the *Centauro* Arm. Div.. Its successive objects: the roadway node of Kalibaki, the basin of Gianina, road node of Arta. The first one was to be conquered, the others two reached for the continuation of the *Centauro*.

The *Centauro* Arm. Div., after the release of the roadway node of Kalibaki, would have passed the *Ferrara* and reached Arta. To find that the coordination of the employment of the two divisions was entrusted to understandings between the two commanders.

The *Siena* Inf. Div. had the task to quickly flank the defense of Gianina.

To the grouping of the Shoreline, finally, it was up to sweep up the Greek defense between Konispoli and the sea and to head directly at Preveza in order to turn from the south the enemy forces in Epirus. More it just had to break the enemy lines between Konispoli and the sea with the 3rd grenadiers and to reach Igoumenitsa. Therefore to continue along the coastal selvage with the *Aosta* lancers and to push the *Milan* lancers on Arta.

The *Macedonian area* was entrusted to the *Parma* division, with the task to guarantee integrity of Korçano and the safety of the left flank of the offensive alignment, while the Yugoslavian frontier was watched by the *Venezia* and *Arezzo* Inf. Divs.. In reservoir the *Piemonte* division, located probably in the zone of Pogradec and oriented to take part both in the Greek theater, and in Dibrano in case of eventual Yugoslav penetrations.

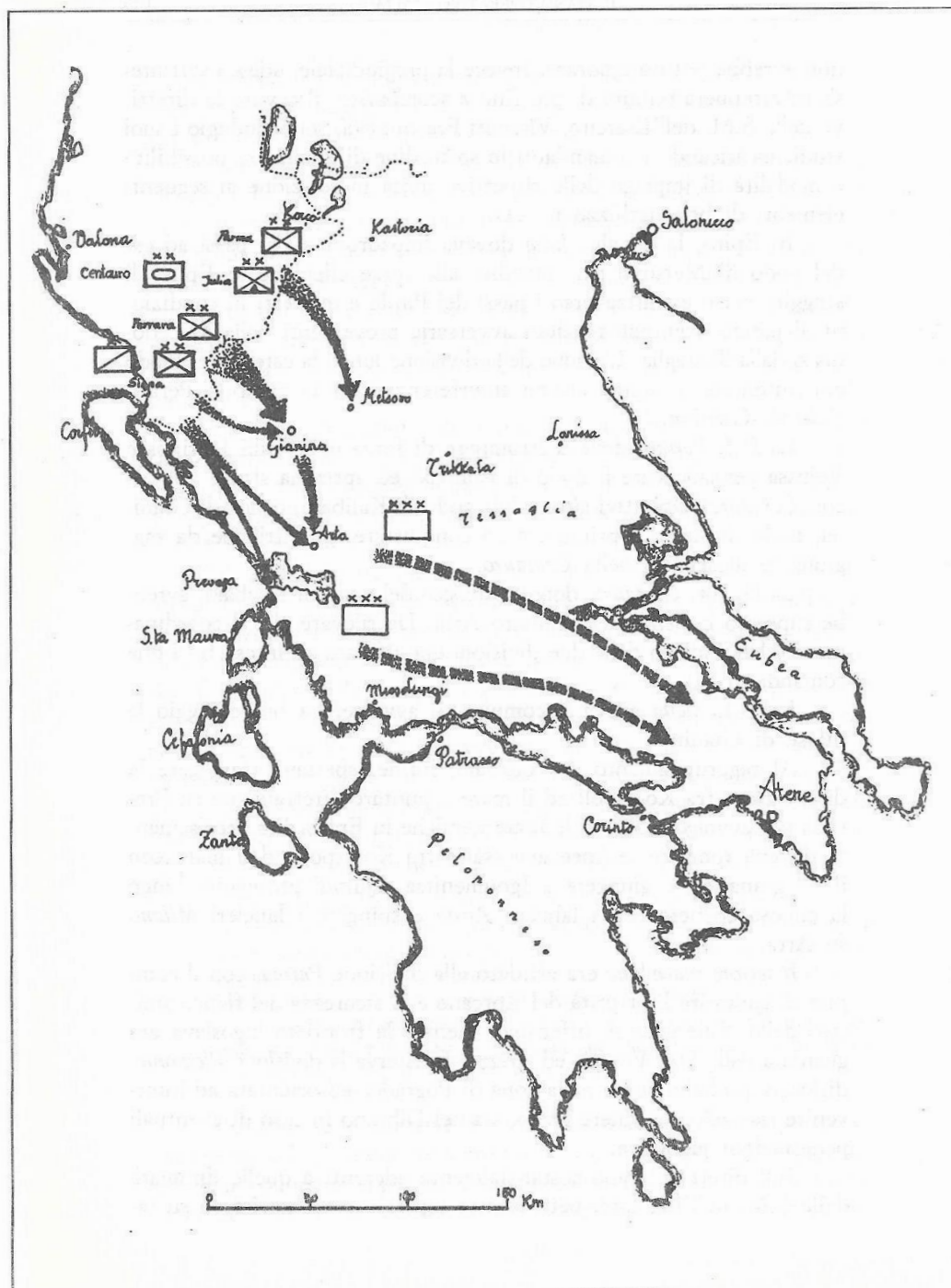
Such directives were substantially adherent to those circulated from the G.S. of the Army, but Roatta express some reserves on some

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The plan Visconti Prasca (September 1940)

Schizzo n. 11

IL PIANO VISCONTI-PRASCA (SETTEMBRE 1940)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

aspects, among which was the wide intervals between the too many columns, the objectives were not always well defined and the excessive isolation of the *Julia*. Visconti Prasca convene on the observations, but written trace of the suggested and accepted modifications does not exist. It seems, in any case, holding also present the conditions and knowing to be a matter itself of orders in first approximation, being able to formulate some relief.

The command organization. We will return on the subject during examination of the device on 28 October, but already the nonexistence of one is noticed the rational solution of the problem. "Having nothing to do with the fact that the uncertainty depended essentially on the person of the Comandante Superiore, the G.S. of the Army had pointed out to the splitting of the XXVI army corps Commander in order to achieve the availability is of the Comando Superiore both of the Commander of true and just the XXVI Corps, in charge to frame the divisions of the offensive maneuver; the others reins were to divisional level. The solution in if it appears rather disputable, but very probably was be a matter of a "waiting movement", reasonable in a study. We know, in fact, that for Roatta the answer was obvious: a Army Commander and the two army corps Commanders, one for the Epirus and one for Macedonian, plus one or two divisions directly employed by the army.

Visconti Prasca, the commander wanted by Gen. Soddu and welcome to Mussolini and Ciano, had in sure sense flown over the subject in order not to appear intentionally forcing the hand to the General Staff. Certain he does not encourage the employment of the *Ferrara* and *Centauro* divisions - that "*probably form a tactical battlegroup 'Vojussa- Dhrino'*" - seen under a series of agreements directed between the commanders of two major unit.

The operating concept. The General Staff had expressed very clearly: a action sturdy concentrated along the Gianina - Arta direction and an eventual concomitant action ("*could be flanked*") along the Konispoli – Paramithia - Pre direction. The safety on the left flank (Pindo) had to be assured from the main column. Visconti Prasca, instead spoke to envelop the Greek forces in the bag of the Epirus and for this purpose he assigned to every column - too many - a task that concurred a series of partial turnings.

The employment of the forces. Binding life and combat of the *Julia* to the atmosphere of the *Pindo* seems excessive, also and above all for the limited autonomy that could be conferred. The isolation imposed in the tactical field had to last until to the attainment not of

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Metsovo from part of the division, but of Gianina from part of the main column. According to the directives of Visconti Prasca, in fact, the *Julia* had "*to prevent the opposing forces in Ciamuria from escaping towards the east through the Metsovo pass*" and "*to then parry eventual opposing reactions coming from the Macedonian compartment*". In other words; for trapping the troops of the Epirus - pre-eminent task - it was necessary to precede the advance of the *Ferrara-Centauro* column whereas, second the understanding of the G.S. of the Army, the action to reserve to the *Julia* - flanking - it had a safety character and it could be carried out proceeding more or less to the height of the main body, with smaller risks and hard work.

Circa the employment of the *Centauro*, the search of the timeliness of participation of the tanks had induced to prescribe that part of armored units "*were locked under the infantry groups*", so as to be able to carry out slipping through intervals "*even the initiative*". Evidently it must think that the directive meant to refer to tank companies disposed to support of the battalions in first group, but such cooperation infantry-tank did not re-enter any in the doctrinal norms of the time, less still, in the training programs and it would not have been easy for difficulty in the radio connections. Also on purpose of the Litorale battlegroup appears problematic possibility of effective control of action independent of three regiments, place that intentional and was prescribed *a regimen of complete autonomy* and that a true commander was previewed for the battlegroup and not just, simply a commander with but a small nucleus of staff.

Finally, two words on the organization of the services, without to come down into the details. The logistic autonomy was reduced, to the practical action, the equipments of unit and divisional; nevertheless the difficulties of supply until Gianina had to appear clearly, given the existence of one single, and bad; road on which moved two divisions with relative artilleries and army corps supports. In the second place, it is lawful to express serious doubts on the concreteness of the disposition to preview the road haulage of an entire division (the *Siena*) personal and material, let alone of the resource "in wide measure" to the local baggage train, than they were known by now almost nonexistent.

It is however right to insist on the fact that if the political premises had come true all would have been carried out probably without too many disadvantages, sure without many dangers.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

4. THE DEFINITIVE PLAN (20 OCTOBER 1940).

During the meeting of 15 October, the development of the talk carried to conclude: "*offensive in Epirus, observation and pressure on Salonico and, according to time, march on Athens*". In effects, approximately the first point all it had been defined with the plan for *Contingency G*, and for how much it concerns the *pressure* on *Salonico* appears logical to think to be a matter of rather more a pompous expression and rhetorical in order to point out to the cover in the Macedonia area, nobody being able, neither for joke, to mean to move with two binary divisions against five ternary backed by which we knew of three others available in reserve.

The innovation was according to time, that is Athens. It had not ever been taken in consideration. Not in the Guzzoni - Pariani plan because, after the destruction of the bulk of the Greek army in Macedonian, the occupation of the entire territory did not cover worry. Not in the Geloso plan because, as it has been said, the objective was limited. It was Mussolini, who on 15 October, requested without warning as was seen the march on Athens, after the occupation of the Epirus. For Visconti Prasca it was possible without many difficulties with a group of five or six divisions, of which three organized mountain to disembark at Arta. Badoglio and Roatta did not raise objections.

The consequent orders were circulate on 20 October by the G.S. of the Army⁽⁷⁾ and specified, as a result of much already communicated, than the beginning of the hostilities was contemporary for the invasion of Epirus and the disembarkation at Corfù; the occupation of the Epirus had to come extensive to the dominant positions from south and from east the gulf of Arta, in sight of further advancing and in order to allow the disembarkation of major units in reinforcements; finally, the *Bari* Inf. Div, occupied Corfù, would be the last under the orders of the Comando Superiore of Albania.

Arriving reinforcements in sufficient measure, would be begun the second phase leaving from the Epirus with Athens as the objective, along the guideline Arta- Lamia- Atalanti- Tanagra and Agrinion-Missolungi- Athens troops of Korçano had initially to be kept on the active defensive, then, conveniently reinforced then, to pass to the offensive in direction of Florina and Kastoria in order to attract on them the attention and the Greek forces of the Macedonian. In case of serious inner Greek collapse, and that is taking place the breaking of the Greek army, the course

(7) DSCSTA, f.4100 dated 20.10.1940 of the S.M.R.E.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of the penetration it could have place also without to wait on the programmed reinforcements.

Moreover they came to indicated major unit of successive affluence, for which the G.S. of the Army had immediately suspended the departure of the *Trieste* mot. Div, whose arrival in Albania was previewed before 15 November⁽⁸⁾; one mountain or alpine division, with whose transport at the moment was not possible to make forecasts; three mountain divisions or alpine in course of preparation, that is still to be moved to a war footing; one Cavalry division with two or three regiments of cavalry, also to be prepared.

In last was defined the delicate problem of the command organization. Here it is necessary to take a step behind. Before the beginning of the campaign the Comando Superiore coincided with XXVI army corps Commander, resisted by Visconti Prasca, under whose orders were all the troops of the army (not of the other Armed Forces) located in Albania. When the *Contingency G* was outlined, the General Staff of the Army proposed the constitution of an Army Command with Geloso, to whose dependencies to put XXVI Corps Command of Visconti Prasca and second to Command of army corps with other generals with equal rank. Mussolini did not receive the proposal and ordered that in Albania they were not employed generals in degree higher or older then Visconti Prasca. The General Staff then sketched, as possible solution, an outline according to which from the Comando Superiore resisted from Visconti Prasca, they would be new depended (for splitting) XXVI Corps Command, to assign to other divisional generals, and more fields, undoubtedly too much skillful articulation in order to appear valid. On the other hand, at the end of September, Visconti Prasca addressed to Soddu privately clearly making understood not appreciate and not to think necessary the arrival of another general with relative General Staff in order to constitute XXVI Corps Commander, detaching it from the Comando Superiore, and that instead the structure in action it went very well.

As the argument had been seen remained in suspension, also for effect of the see-saw of yes and no on the war, until 14 October, when the G.S. of the Army indicated another possible grouping of the forces: Army Corps North, with the *Arezzo* and the *Venezia*, on the Yugoslavian frontier;

8) The *Trieste* was never sent totally to Albania. Only the Commando of division and the 21st Artillery flowed between the 19 and 24 November. The rest, caused by the more urgent and the huge number of transport steamboats that it would have demanded, remained in Italy.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

the *Parma* in the area of Korça; the *Julia* in the area of the Pindo; Army Corps South, with the *Siena*, *Ferrara* and *Centauro*, in the Epirus; the Litorale battlegroup in the coastal area; the *Piemonte* in reserve.

At the same time it arranged the constitution of two Army Corps Commands and designated Generals (of division with the assignment of advanced grade) to them assigned, leaving the definition of the management of battle to the Comandante Superiore, but suggesting to employ both Commands on the Greek front, rather than one on the Yugoslavian front and the other on the Epirusan. In particular it specified:

- the aforesaid General Officers arriving over there with a small G.S., than providing to integrate, signaling to this Superesercito further requirements on intension;
- given the urgency, and since the Command of the XXVI C.A. is comprised in the organic of peace (and can not abolish), remains intended to that one of the two Commanders of Army Corps in word will be identified with the command of the XXVI Corps, and other will be a "tactical commander";
- the Comando Superiore Albania Troops will cease to identify himself, as currently, with the command of the XXVI Corps;
- he puts into effect the Management of the services which will be gradually converted into the Intendancy (with a leader to put into effect the directives").

We say at once that also this solution appears much debatable: the six tactical reins plus the Intendancy and the commands of arm beyond the smaller units are excessive. One arrives that the attention and the engagement of the Comandante Superiore could not that to concentrate itself on the necessity to coordinate the maneuver of three major unit of the offensive (Army Corps South, *Julia* and Litorale battlegroup) neglecting against one's will the rest.

So that, a week before the war declaration they arrived in Albania, Generals Gabriele Nasci and Carlo Rossi. The first one found a Command (XXVI Corps) divided to profit of the Comando Superiore, the second found still less and had to supply scraping together personally personal between his divisions. Frankly the responsibilities with carelessly to cannot be attributed only to the Visconti Prasca. And true that these it did not want, for personal reasons, *certain* changes in the articulation of command:

"(...) I have the founded presumption that this participation of other Commanders would be wanted to be transformed to: operations of the Epirus, in veiling, but directing disablement of my action of command, with others entrusting the entire operating Epirusan area, while I would remain overall commander but effectively watching responsible of the events",

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

justifying such interest directed with somewhat specious motivations:

"(...) to the changing circumstances of the action without possibility of competitions from Italy, it is necessary to make front with groupings crystallized "prior"(...) "⁽⁹⁾.

But if *one* single commander of army corps central character with the Epirus operation did not appreciate, he wished some instead *two*, of course under his orders, because they would automatically have carried the Comando Superiore to the level of an army, as of the rest it was logical. Also however the ministry of the War, in whose competence re-entered the argument, left that the things matured from it, without giving a clear formulation and specify and their work to this aspect of the organization. It will not be late to pay by same the Soddu consequences, in first person.

And difficult to recover justifications for therefore a serious delay of solution in a delicate matter therefore; of the par the idea cannot be accepted to constitute worse on the place and *in extremis* a Commander of major unit with embezzled elements in subordinate Commands or still, to the units. The implicit excuse resists some that be a matter of "tactical command" the evil was little relief: the functions of a Commander are those that are and under a sure *minimum* he cannot be come down without to affect his efficiency. To the contrary, the tendency to all the levels appears unequivocal to underrate the necessity to decide of Commands truly works them. It has been seen of the skimpy Comando Supremo, more or less of the dimensions than one secretariat; it is seen now with the two Commanders of the Army Corps; it will be seen between little with "the tactical" Commander of the battlegroup of the Litorale entrusted at the last moment to Gen. Rivolta, commander of the frontier Guard of Albania; very late with the unexpected constitution of two Commanders of the army will be seen. Not draft, in similar cases of the simple recovery of staff officers and line officers, both necessary also personal of order sufficiently trained, and necessary communications centers, means of transport. It can be asserted, in the light of the hard truth of the events, than the drama of the troops of Albania it has been first of all the drama of Commanders of major unit posted in nearly the impossibility - at least initially - to exercise

9) Cited letter to Gen. Soddu dated 30.9.1940. For recorded, this letter seems to confirm more the persuasion once that Visconti Prasca of being able to resolve the Epirus issue with only his forces.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

their functions. In December this aspect of the crisis was only exceeded to a little worse.

The S.M.R.E. had considered also the issue of Corfù and the Ionian islands. Hearing Admiral Tur, designated naval commander, he subjected the conclusions to the Joint Chief of Staff. In synthesis, for Corfù it was thought (in the general atmosphere of the enterprise) that the operation could be painless; he was therefore desirable that the Italian consular representative at Corfù to remain and that he had instructions to declare to the local authorities, in the moment in which there were to appeared our ships, than from the Italian side would not have been opened fire in case of land attack had not started, and that the first aircraft flying over the island launch manifesting of the same tenor. The aerial competition of combat was widely previewed, but only required by the naval commander in case of resistance. With respect to S. Maura, Cefalonia and Zante, the S.M.R.E. found that:

"in the plan of this General Staff (that it contemplated an action only in the Epirus until to the gulf of Arta), the occupation of the three aforesaid islands was considered as an eventuality to realize in the second phase.

Currently, instead, since it is previewed to continue the penetration from the Epirus on Athens, proceeding to north of the gulf of Corinto, the occupation of the islands appears necessary. Obvious considerations of blanket order induce to think that it must be completed at the same time to that one of Corfù (...)"⁽¹⁰⁾.

The ideal would have been to occupy all three islands, but this would have involved the employment of an entire division and considerations of naval order and availability of steamboats induced to think that it was not possible; therefore it was opportune to limit itself at first to the occupation of the main island, Cefalonia, that for its position and its inlet (Argostoli) turned out the more important by far, entrusting the enterprise to a reinforced regiment.

On 23 October the Comando Supremo summarized all the operations previewed for the Contingency G and the successive day Badoglio commented on the plan to the meeting of the Chiefs of general staff⁽¹¹⁾. Any word of dissent newly must find in this center the absence of one or other worry from part of the General head of G.S., which forty eight hours before it had known of the refusal of king Boris to take part. One can also be reproached letter quite

10) DSCS, f. 4030/op. dated 18.10.1940.

11) DSCS, meeting report dated 24.10.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

euphoric written to Gen. De Vecchi, Comandante Superiore of the Aegean, for announcing that the 28th would have had beginning the "*punitive expedition*" against Greece. But, once again, they are stronger the abashment and the uneasiness provoked from his participation at the meeting. The first argument touched was the problem of Corfù, to whose purpose came decided to renounce if the conditions of the sea had not allow the disembarkation in at least two points. The second was the eventual occupation of Cefalonia, that it was delayed to a successive moment to define without urgency. The third reflects the general plan:

"The alignment puts into effect by the Greek forces - Badoglio said - creed will not be able to have time to change much given the enormous difficulty of movement, is for the nature of the land, is for the sparsely of the communications and means.

The six divisions deployed in Thrace reveal all the worry for an eventual action from part of Bulgaria.

The six divisions deployed against us have such location for which it will not be easy to modify it.

Now, in departure, we will have the bulk of six divisions towards the bag of the Epirus, one division more to the north in the director of Salonicco and two divisions on the Yugoslavian front.

From the first or second day, we will come to know the Yugoslavian behavior. For how much the Duce has said to me, and I am of this opinion, Yugoslavia is not moving. The Duce has said to me also that Turkey is not moving because there is a Portuguese proverb that says: "in time of storm everyone thinks next to himself".

It seems opportune then that the Commander of the troops takes a twofold order of provisions: to always hold one division ready behind supporting the division that nozzle towards the direction of Salonicco, and disengaging some other from the Yugoslavian frontier, replacing it with local bands, and to make it to flow to the south; it will in this way have a reserve of two divisions. Sure the Gen. Visconti Prasca will have thought next to this but it is reminding him the thing always well.

I pray therefore the General Staff of the Army to make present how much I have said (we lack still four days) and therefore to take the provisions in order to see if this division can be replaced by local bands. In this way we will be in conditions for making headway to an eventual counter-offensive for how much unlikely, from part of the Greek troops and will have also an outline for the actions of the second phase ".

I compute of the forces, equal is in the summary of the plan is in the comment of the meeting, was following: for the Epirus, six divisions: *Julia*, *Ferrara*, *Siena*, *Centauro*, BG. of Litorale and *Piemonte*; for the Korçano, one division, *Parma*; towards Yugoslavia, two divisions, *Venezia* and *Arezzo*.

But "after some day, the guideline changed and was emphasized

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the opportunity of the made locate to assume by the *Piemonte* (Korça zone), so as to "to eventually be able to support the "*Parma*" division of infantry ". Not only, but, in adhesion to much said from Badoglio, the Comandante Superiore was invited "to preview the substitution of the "*Venezia*" infantry division (*once Yugoslavia stated neutrality*) *with other bands plus units for having, necessity case, one third division available on the Korfa frontie* "⁽¹²⁾.

But in this meeting "*that is final because after the facts will speak*", as Badoglio expressed, a comparison with the availabilities of the enemy was not made. Nevertheless on the 21st Grazzi had given a telegraph from Athens:

"n. 453. Reservists to average personal garnishment let alone transports of troop from the Peloponnese numerous callbacks continue towards the north. Military attaché calculates that approximately 300 thousand men are under arms currently ".

And the 24th in the per diem history of the Comando Supremo was written:

"According to informative sources the force under arms of the Greek army is gone around on the 320-350 thousand men. The divisions of Patrasso and Nauplia would be already nearly totally flowed to the Albanian frontier in the Epirus area."

Therefore, being the news received, they were at least exact, Visconti Prasca was in order to face the 3rd, 4th and 8th divisions, as well as others mobilized in the zone, with five divisions, of which one of formation and one isolated in the Pindo. We will return to in this discourse.

To continuation of the cited final directives of the G.S. of the Army, Gen. Visconti Prasca emanated his own orders defined with which instructed Gen. Rivolta to assume the tactical command of the Litorale battlegroup; it substantially confirmed the operation guidelines given opportunely; he arranged the movement of the *Venezia* in the Korçano, so that the Commander XXVI C.A. "*of it he predisposed the insertion in the defensive sector, possibly to the left of the 'Parma'*", and extended towards the lake of Ohrida the responsibility of the *Arezzo* division; he supplied further clarification on the objectives on which demanded the participation of the airforce.

In the meantime had arrived from a letter signed by Mussolini, a tithe of encouragement:

Dear Visconti,

You know, and if you do not know now to you I say, that I opposed all the attempts order to remove You from command on the eve of action.

12) DSCSTA, fono 4402/op. dated 24.10.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Believe that the events, but above all your the work will give me reason.
Attack with the maximum decision and violence.
The success of the action depends above all on its rapidity.
Rome, 25 October 1940 Mussolini

Finally, on the 27th moved with the tactical command post to Libohovo and confirmed to the G.S. of the Army to have given course as fixed and suggested. The same day arrived from Rome the executive message:

"n. 10356 *stop* every to good end given confirmation given to begin land operations for day 28 *stop* As given inflexible *stop* for Corfù operation depends on sea conditions *stop* for giving assurance Superesercito".

Gen. Visconti Prasca answered:

"Adverse atmospheric conditions. In the night of the 28th torrential rain & wind. Strongly increasing run of water. To the hours zero troop everywhere deployed and ready to attack & to release 07:30 hours *stop* moral highest *stop*".

5. THE ALIGNMENT ON 28 OCTOBER.

The evening of the 27th all was ready. Also the enemy. We will examine, step by step the Italian dispositions on the base of the salient features of the directives of the Comando Superiore Albania and the operations orders of the subordinate Commands.

The maneuver design.

The operating concept of Visconti Prasca for the invasion of the Epirus was formulated in these terms: to advance with the main mass on the Kalibaki-Gianina-Arta axis; to block with other forces the pass of Metsovo and the south outlet of the Epirus (street node Filippiade-Arta).

We are, therefore, far away from the emphatic expressions rather used in the directives of 16 September and would seem much to find itself in full tuning with the thought of the G.S. of the Army. But there is way and manner to develop a maneuver design, and the Gen. Visconti Prasca maintained the beginning modalities, holding firm his vision of the action.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

The Greek forces.

Held account of the criticism the fate on the comparison between the entity of the opposite forces, it will not be bad to expose as our information organs thought the enemy deployment and what intentions were attributed to it. The hypothesis was accepted that the enemy proposed itself to defend itself in the Epirus, at first in proximity of the frontier and then in correspondence of the alignment f. Kalamas - junction Kalibaki - the north-west slope of m. Gamila - junction of Konitsa - m. Grammos, with a resistance supported by field works and permanent fortification, let alone anti- tank obstructions. Also a offensive from Macedonia was considered possible in order to act to the side of our forces entering the Epiruan area ⁽¹³⁾.

In fact, for the Macedonian area the information agreed on a sure lightening in the zone of the lake and a remarkable strengthening of Korçano fronte, increased from continuous affluence of new units. The following alignment was thought probable:

in the first formation from lake Prespa to the Grammos, elements of the 4th, 9th and 22nd division;

in the second formation, Kastoria area, the 6th division;

in reserve, Florina- Verria-Edessa area, the 10th division.

In all, five divisions of infantry for a total of 14 infantry regiments and two of frontier, naturally at most, formed in to the IV Army Corps. To add, then, five regiments of divisional artillery beyond to various groups not well specified, and a cavalry regiment. In total 60-70 thousand men. All that made to think next to the absence of worries from part of Athens for the Yugoslavian frontier and next to understand a probable counter-offensives towards Korça.

In the Epiruan area, instead, it had been found a strengthening of the positions in frontier strip and the presence of a division of infantry (the 1st, on three regiments of infantry) in the Metsovo - Trikkala zone, with the obvious purpose to absolutely guarantee the communications between Epirus and Macedonia- Tessaglia and of being able to take part in that one of the two fields in which the greater danger had been manifested. The elements characterized indicated the probable existence of a army corps with three - four divisions (excluding the 1st Inf. Div.)

13) Sufficient to have this eventuality, recognized as possible, in order to replace in the discussion the entire plan.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

for total 8 regiments of infantry and 1 of frontier. In total 50-60 thousand men.

The reconstruction made from the information organs to the date of 26 October was not of all exact. In Macedonian - Tessaglia they came calculates elements of sixteen regiments of infantry and effectively the indication was adherent to the truth, even if the approximately half of the regimental ordered did not correspond, while in the Epirus they were considered nine regiments whereas, at least for the moment, there was five (but reinforced). To part that, the organization in major unit, as better we will see later on, does not find reply with the Greek dispositions before the beginning of the hostilities.

The Italian forces in the Epirus area.

In Epirus three complicated forces had to act: the new Army Corps *Ciamuria*, the *Julia* and the Litorale battlegroup, with the eventual participation of the *Piemonte*, held in reserve.

The Army Corps with the *Ciamuria* (Gen. Carlo Rossi) had the *Siena* (Gen. Gabutti), of the *Ferrara* (Gen. Zannini) and the *Centauro* (Gen. Magli). According to the maneuver design it had to break off with the mass of the forces (*Ferrara* reinforced) the enemy resistance to placed to the defense of the junction of Kalibaki; to facilitate the advance of such mass with flanking action on the right (*Siena*), and another subsidiary one for left (part of the *Centauro*); to quickly complete and to take advantage of success in the direction of Gianina and Arta (*Centauro*) (the sketch n. 12).

The *Julia* (Gen. Girotti) had to reach with the maximum speed and decision the junction of the Metsovo, acting with two columns, and to cover the left flank by means of the occupation of the passes of the Pindo (sketch n. 13).

The Litorale battlegroup (Gen. Rivolta) had three distinguished objectives: Luros for the 3rd grenadiers, Preveza for the lancers of *Aosta* and Arta for the lancers of *Milano*. Therein had joined the task to inhibit the influx of Greek units, to predispose the outlet on Missolongi and to facilitate the disembarkment of reinforcements to Preveza and Arta (sketch n. 14).

However its attention in this field is from evidencing as necessarily the Comandante Superiore had to carry all - to the detriment of the others - in order to make to feel its coordination and its force of propulsion. Moreover, if the *Ciamuria* Army Corps were lacking in the normal tactical-organic structure (artillery, connections, reserves, services), the Comando Superiore was not better and the only one

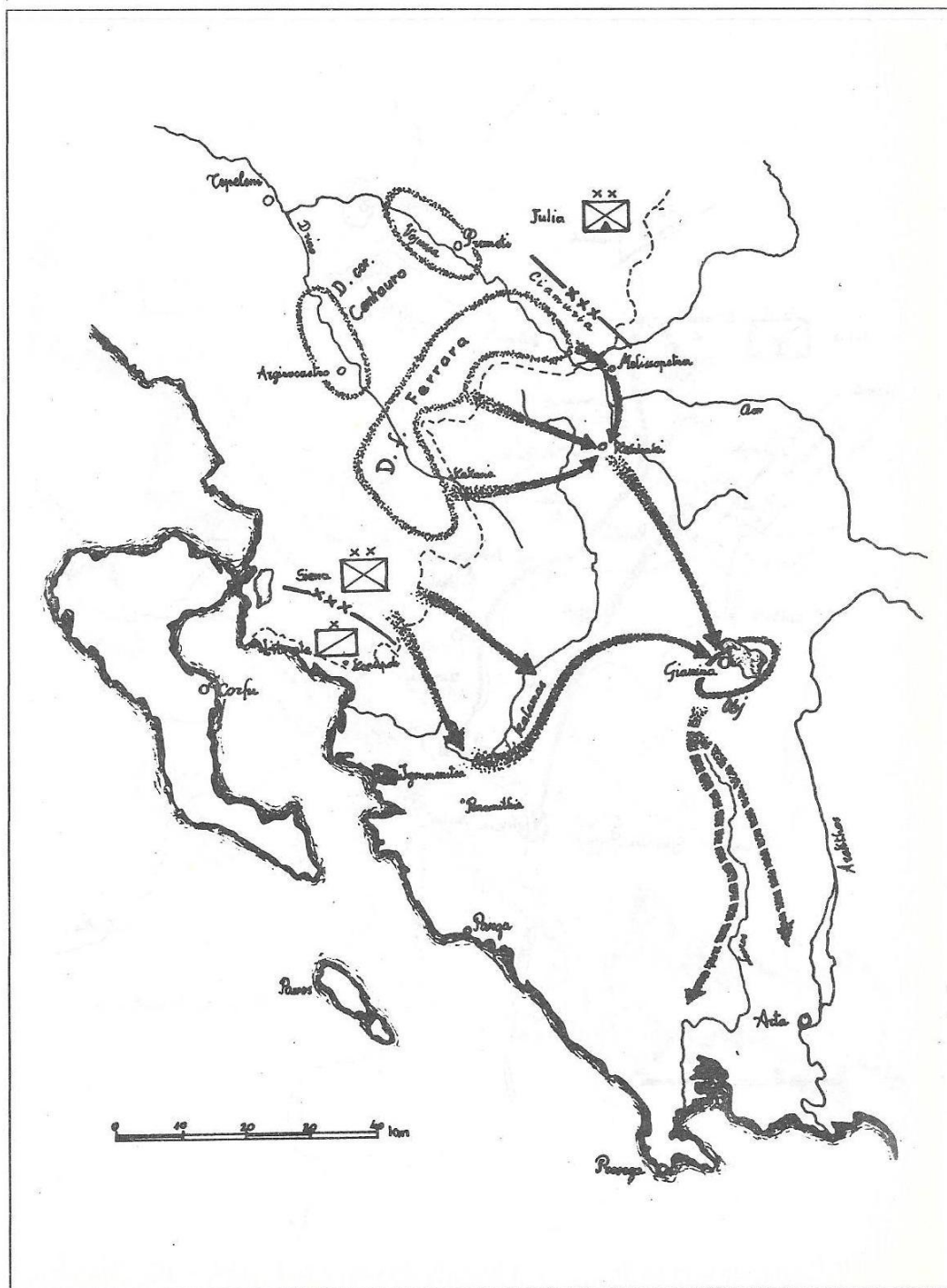
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 123

The operating task of the *Ciamuria* army corps

Schizzo n. 12

IL COMPITO OPERATIVO DEL C.A. «CIAMURIA»



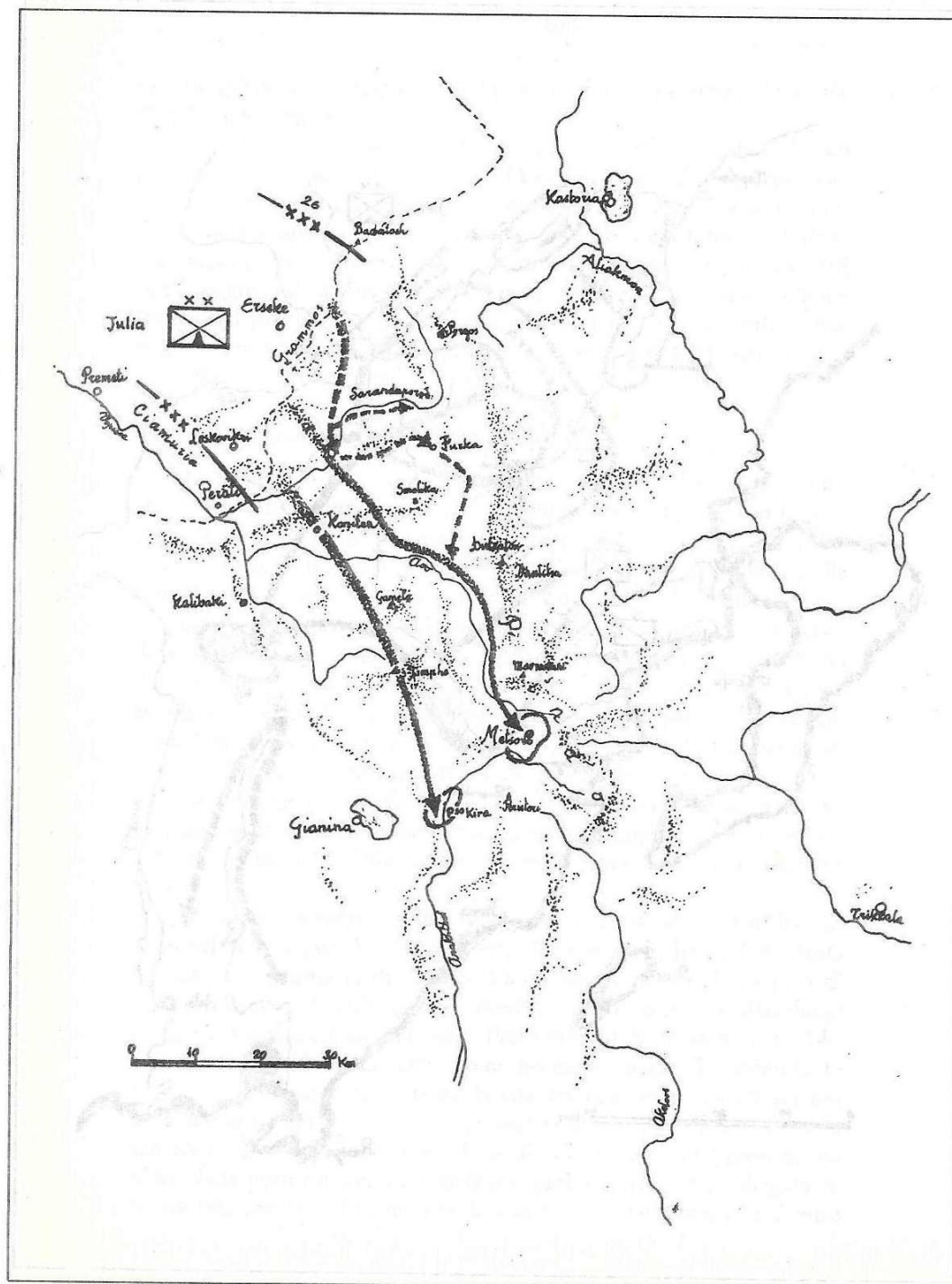
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 124

The task of the Julia alp. Div.

Schizzo n. 13

IL COMPITO OPERATIVO DELLA D. ALP. «JULIA»



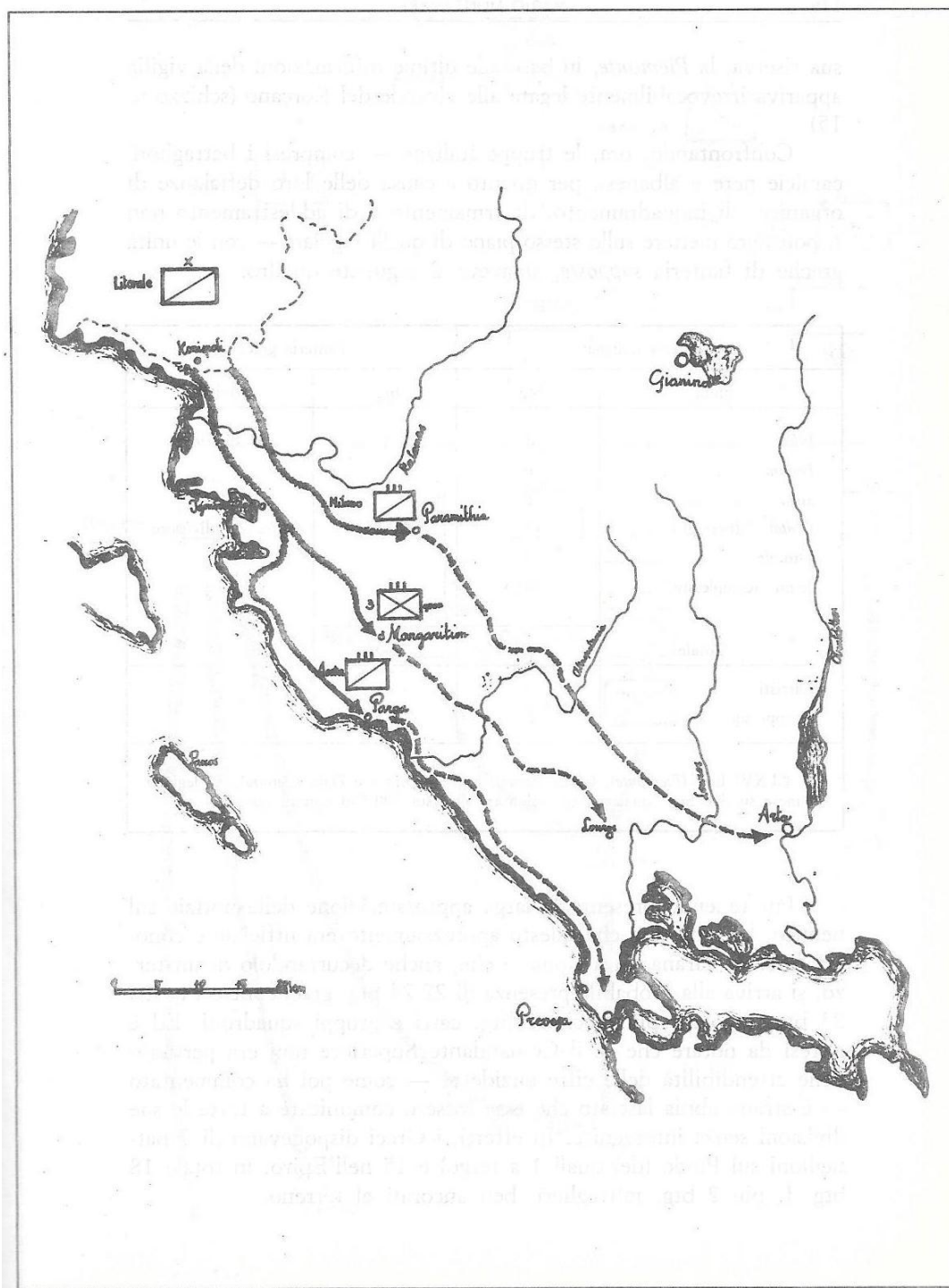
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 125

The operating task of the Litorale grouping

Schizzo n. 14

IL COMPITO OPERATIVO DEL RGPT DEL LITORALE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

his reserves, the *Piemonte*, based on the last information of the eve appeared irrevocably tied to the vicissitudes of the Korçano (sketch n. 15)

Confronting, now, the Italian troops - the including the Camicie Nere and Albanian, battalions for as far as cause of their deficiencies of organic, organization, armament and training could not be put but slowly on the same footing of those regulars - with the *supposed* Greek units of infantry, the following picture was had:

Italian infantry		Greek Infantry	
unit	bns.	bns.	unit
<i>Julia</i>	5	9	8 th division
<i>Ferrara</i>	6		
<i>Siena</i>	6		
<i>Centauro</i> (bersagl.)	3	24-27	another 2-3 divisions
Litorale	3		
CC.NN. (compressive)	10*		
Total	33	33-36	
Tanks	4	-	
Sqd. Groups	6	2-3	
*CLXVI btg. (<i>Piemonte</i>); CXLI (<i>Siena</i>); bns. Grammos and Dajti (<i>Ferrara</i>); 1 st Albanese legion with two btg.; four btg. voluntary alb. (with the 300-350 men each).			

Holding also present the wide approximation of the news on the enemy, it must be said that this official appreciation and it was known both to Tirana is and Rome and that, also curtailing it of a third part, he arrives himself to the probable presence of 22-24 Greek bns. against our 23 regular bns., ten more between bns. tanks and squadrons. And it is also from noticing that if the Comandante Superiore were not persuaded of the reliabilities of the above-mentioned figures - like then it has commented it is strange has allowed that they were communicated to all his divisions without to take part. In effects, the Greeks had 3 battalions on the Pindo (of which 1 to rear) and 15 in the Epirus: in total 18 bns. Inf. plus 2 bns. machine-gunners, well berthed to the land.

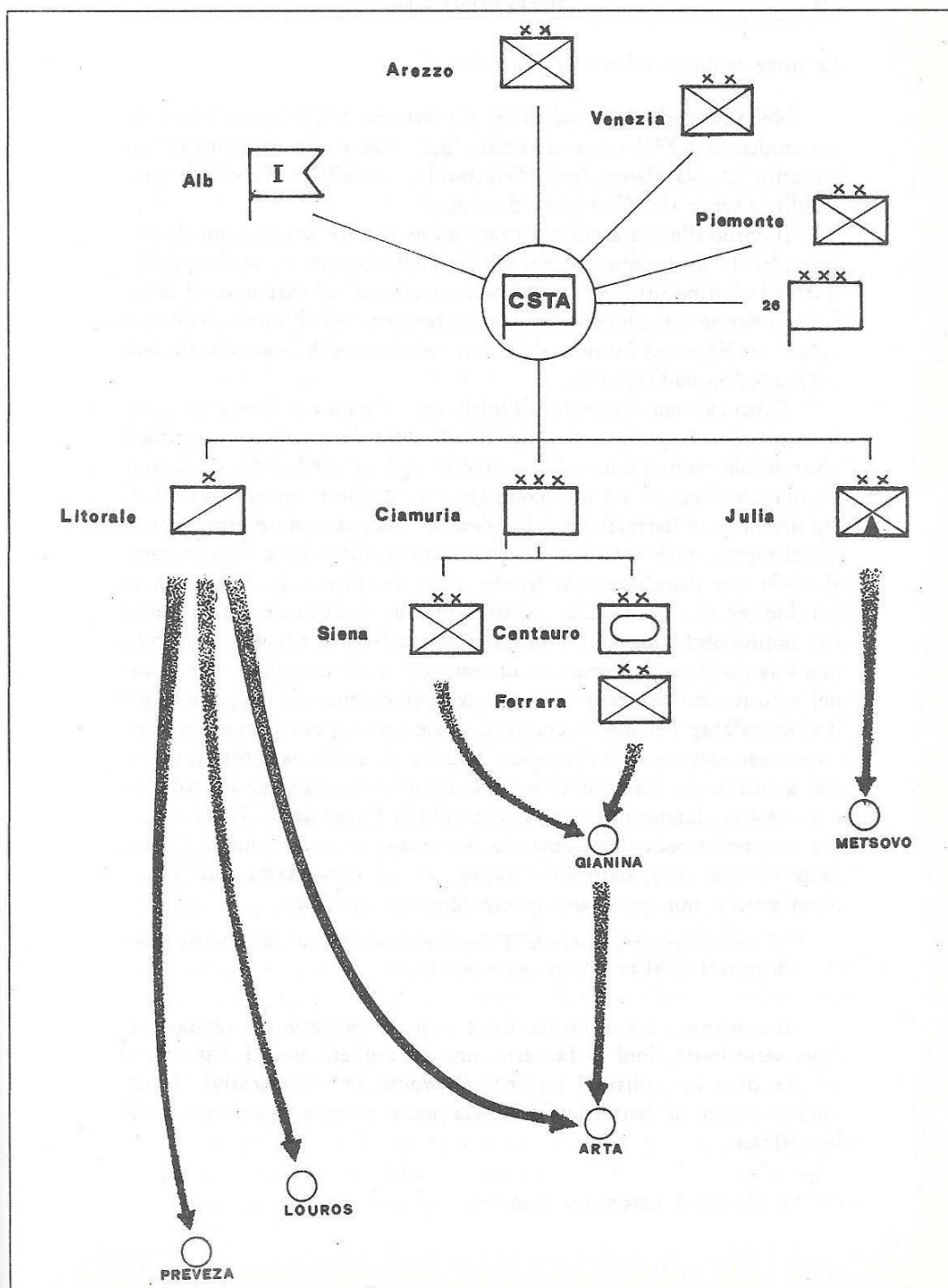
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 127

Articulation of command in Albania 28.10.1940

Schizzo n. 15

L'ARTICOLAZIONE DI COMANDO IN ALBANIA IL 26 OTTOBRE 1940



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

The Italian forces in the Macedonian area.

In the western Macedonian, or rather in the Korçano, the XXVI Army Corps (Gen. Nasi) was being created. For the moment was present only the *Parma* (Gen. Grattarola), as well as the *Piemonte* (Gen. Naldi), reserve of the Comando Superiore.

The Army Corps was oriented to assure the positions of border with a mostly dynamic attitude; to occupy the useful features of border for a offensive outlet; to deceive the enemy, being simulated a contemporary offensive action to the beginning of the operations in Epirus and finally to defend to the utmost the positions of Mali the Thate – Morova - Grammos.

All that, naturally, at the beginning was entrusted to the *Parma*, in how much Nasi did not have anything new. With difficulty was successful to form a small reserve with a mobile carabinieri battalion, one light tank company and one company bersaglieres motorcyclists. On the 27th had arrived a battalion of the *Venezia*, but it was always small. Therefore Nasi represented to the Comando Superiore the difficulty and the incongruity of his situation: a front one hundred of kilometers, of which two thirds part with Greece, harsh and difficult and on which it was anything but improbable true and own enemy counter-offensive, held by one single division reinforced by a battalion of machine-guns. For arriving in the area the *Piemonte*, evidently untouchable was located for the Commander of the XXVI Corps, which it did not know until that point could count and however he risked to having to give executive orders to compromised situation. Visconti Prasca understood the problem and resolved it, at least in part, assigning the *Piemonte* to XXVI Corps, but with a mortgage of the Comando Superiore, and confirming the arrival of the *Venezia*. Then, since little encouraging symptoms on the Greek intentions could not be ignored, he admitted:

"The success in the area of the Epirus depends in great part from your binding action of enemy in that one of Macedonia".⁽¹⁴⁾

The comparison between our forces and those presumed of the enemy saw seven battalions of infantry, one machine-guns, one carabinieri and one CC.NN., beyond to the six of the *Piemonte*, for total 16 battalions against 28 Greek battalions already ready and without considering those in influx.

14) DSCSTA, f. 025429 date 27.10.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Conclusion.

The entity of the Italian deployment to the Greek frontier can now be summarized.

The total force amounted to approximately 140,000 men. The units were to 100% of the war establishment for the personnel, at least in the troop, to 75% instead as to draft animals and motor vehicles. The Army Corps artillery was truly insufficient, for the vastness of the theater and in order to fight against an army in whose divisions existed 105 caliber and that it had fortifications of semi permanent character on the frontier.

In two camps we were clearly superior. In the medium tank and aviation. On this point a lot has been persevere in order to emphasize the gravity of the failure of our plan although such advantage. The availability of a good one hundred sixty tanks against zero sure on the paper makes effect. Much less make who it considers the natural atmosphere and as soon as it watches the photographs of the light tanks and reads the technical characteristics and of armament. Then endured the abrupt stop will become comprehensible fixed in front of the junction of Kalibaki from defensive works that sure, were not equal to the Maginot line. For aviation the discussion is various and very immense.

We briefly say something on the Aeronautics of Albania. The task assigned to them from the General Staff of the Aeronautics, on which it depended directly, therefore as the troops of Albania depended on the G.S. of the Army, consisted in the competition to the operation aimed at the occupation of Corfù; in the offense on the air force bases of the Epirus, of the Tessaglia and the Macedonia, on the naval bases of Salonicco and Preveza, on the main lines of communication; in the aerial defense of Albanian territory and in particular of the ports of Valona and Durazzo and of the air force bases. The agreements between the two General Staffs - approved by the Comando Supremo - previewed that the Comando Superiore did not demand of the air forces *actions of vague competition and on the objects of petty importance and not effectively beatable from the sky*. The alignment assumed for the war was following:

- 38th Bombing stormo with SM-81 at Valona;
- 105th Bombing gruppo with SM-79 at Tirana;
- 160th Fighter gruppo with Cr-32 at Drenova;
- 72nd aerial observation gruppo with Ro 37 at Korça, Valona and Argirocastro (a squadron per field).

The consistency, therefore, of the aerial units to the orders of General

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Ranza, initially rather modest since it amounted to approximately forty bombing aircraft and twenty fighters, all rather antiquated, had been upgraded in the imminence of conflict from another hundred more modern fighters and sixty bombers, sent from the fields of Tirana, Valona, and Drenova. Between 10 and 5 November still other units arrived: the 104th Bombing gruppo and the 24th, 154th and 155th Fighter gruppo. Therefore it can be said that in the period at beginning of hostilities Italian aviation in Albania had eight bomber squadrons, nine fighter and three aerial observation. Visconti Prasca in his "Directives for the direct cooperation of the Air weapon to favor of operating troops"⁽¹⁵⁾, having formulated some demands, subordinately to the specific tasks assigned by the General Staff of the Aeronautics.

To fighter aviation: the first day, "*indirect protection for aviation of observation and participation, if possible, with fragmentation bombs and strafing on opposing troops*" eventually found in wait or, with in motion particular with regard to the regions of Smerdeke and Nestrani (Macedonian front), to the bridges and fords of the Kalamas and to the region of Metsovo. The second day, "*in the limits of the possibilities*", participation with *strafing* and *fragmentation bombs* against troops eventually found in the Macedonian and the Epirus compartment.

To bombing aviation: the first day, "*if possible, participation on the following objectives in order of importance*": eventual massing of troops in the Smerdeke, Kastoria, Nestrani pass zone, in order to demolish at the beginning an eventual enemy offensive against Korçano and to trick the adversary on our true understandings; marked reserves in the Metsovo zone; massing of troops and works of fortification in the zone of Kalibaki-Philates, in order to soften the resistance against the army corps with the Ciamuria. On the second day, guideline to renew the previous actions in the Metsovo and in the Macedonian zone, and to regulating the participation in Epirus on the basis of the demands for the Comando Superiore.

We will see subsequently if and because these understandings not knowing the intentional results from both sides.

15) DSCST A f. 025150 date 23.10.1940 addressed to the Aeronautical Command Albania.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Chapter V

THE GREEK OPERATIONS PLAN

1. THE GREEK ARMED FORCES.

The war against Italy entire engaged the war effort of Greece, in part the precautionary measures assumed in the comparisons of Bulgaria, and consequently it becomes opportune to extend the look to the Greek military orderings before examining the forces put into the field against us. The experience of the wars fought from 1913 to 1922 had not offered to suggest any reorganization of the military apparatus, than indeed, after the defeats in Asia Minor, it was left to decay in a visibly emphasized way. Only in 1935, under the push of the public opinion, a special committee composed from several ministers and the most influential political exponents delivered it up, in order to study the way to compatibly put in efficiency the national defense with the economic possibilities of the country. The program previewed the modernization of the material of major unit; the reorganization of the army, widening the peace frame, constituting new Commands and unit and considering a mobilized force of 700,000 men; the improvement of the defense to the land frontiers; the reorganization of the territorial services of campaign and; the system of air defense; the strengthen of the air force with the renew of part of the material of flight and with the construction of new systems on land; the partial renewal of the fleet.

The expense forecasts amounted to four billions and two hundred million drachma for new equipment; three billions for the reorganization of the forces and as many for defensive works.

A total little more than ten billions drachma. Limits of time for the completion of the program: nine years. After various determinate circumstances

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

again from inner the political instability, Gen. Metaxas, already in the successive year, modifying with greater elements of experience deep the launched program and making use of the immediate appropriation of the necessities, by means of loans and credits, announced that the entire program would have been carried to completion before 1937. Undoubtedly he sinned for excess optimism, however it is undeniable that in a cycle of a few years the Greek Armed Forces acquired new vigor and new order.

The peacetime ordering of the army in 1939 comprised five army corps and three independent division (sketch n. 16).

The I Corps had the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Inf. Div.; the II Corps with the 1st and 9th Inf. Div.; the III Corps with the 6th, 10th and 11th Inf. Div.; the IV Corps with the 7th and 14th the Inf. Div.; V the Corps with the 12th and 13th Inf. Div.

They were independent the 5th Inf. Div. at Crete, the 8th Inf. Div. in the Epirus and the 1st Cav. Div. at Salonicco.

Naturally the peace deployment of major unit reflected the general lines of the defensive planning of the country, therefore the 8th Inf. Div. (Gianina) and the II Corps (Larissa) were oriented towards Albania; the IV (Kavala) and the V Corps (Alessandropoli) towards Bulgaria and eventually Turkey; the III Corps (Salonicco) and the Cav. Div. (Salonicco) constituted mass of maneuver, while the I Corps (Atene) and the 5th Inf. Div. (Crete) was in reserve. More in particular, in the Epirus and Macedonian they were located 8th Inf. Div., and the 9th Inf. Div. each one of which had to the safety to extend their own jurisdiction on the corresponding covering *sectors*: the VIII in Epirus and the IX in western Macedonian.

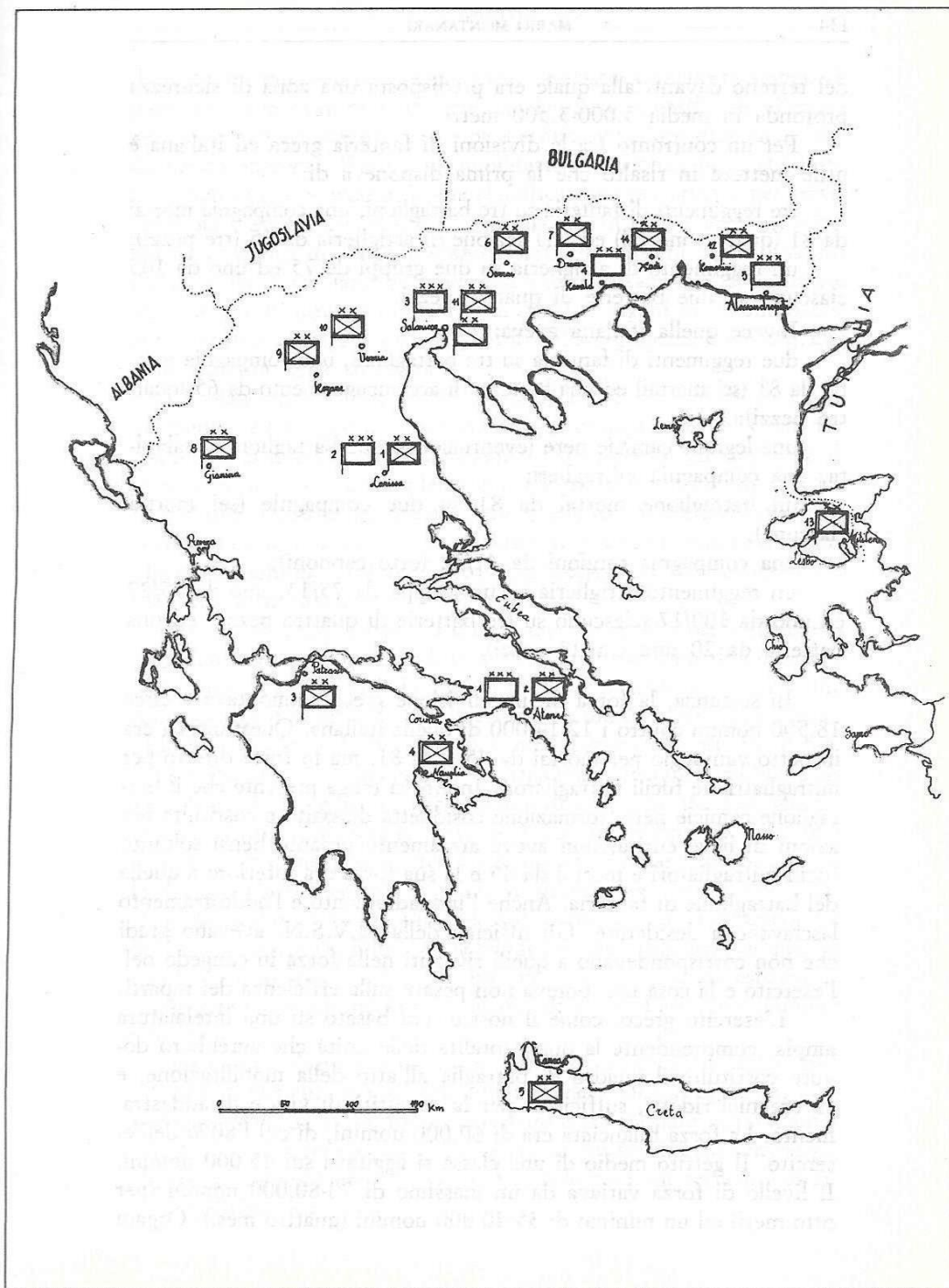
The divisions were of the ternary type, even if someone lacked the third regiment of infantry. The armament could sure not be called modern, at least on the whole, neither for the infantry of for the artillery. This last one, but was equipped of material from 105 in divisional within. Missing completely tanks and armored car and the antitank armament was rather devoid. The total appraisal of the Greek forces on the military plan substantially turned out limited and of it was derived the tendency to consider the Greek soldier like insufficient endowed element of mordant and little adapted to a "regular" war. The superficiality of this appreciation, shared in full load from our politicians and, probably from some general, was refutation clearly from the facts. Also because the moral factors had been held not to matter. The tactical doctrine was of pure French derivation. The defensive position of resistance was variable centralized on depth from the 1,200 to approximately 2,000 meters according to the characteristics

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Deployment in peace time of the Greek army in 1939

Schizzo n. 16

LA DISLOCAZIONE DI PACE DELL'ESERCITO GRECO NEL 1939



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of the land in front of which zone of deep safety in average was predisposed 3.000-3.500 meters.

For a comparison among the divisions of Greek and Italian infantry it is useful to put in prominence that the first had:

three regiments of infantry with three battalions, one company 81 mm mortars (four mortars) and one section of artillery from 65 (three guns);

a regiment of artillery with two groups of 75 and one of 105, each with two batteries of four pieces.

Instead the Italians had:

two regiments of infantry with three battalions, one company 81 mm mortars (six mortars) and one battery of accompaniment from 65 (four pieces);

one camicie nere legion (eventual) with two battalions and, sometimes, one machine-gun company;

a mortar battalion from 81 with two companies (six mortars each);

one company guns from 47/3 2 (eight guns);

a regiment artillery on one group of 75/13, one of 75/27 and one of 100/17 (each with three batteries of four pieces), and one battery of 20 millimeter a.a. (8 pieces).

In short, the force of a Greek division amounted to approximately 18,500 men against the 12-14,000 of the Italian. This last one was in clearly advantage for mortars from 45 and 81, but in strong defect for machine-guns and submachine guns. Moreover present keeps itself who the camicie nere battalion, formation so-called of onslaught and constituted for actions of light entity, did not have heavy armament but rather only guns machine gunners and mortars from 45 and its force was inferior to that one of the infantry battalion. Also the organization and the training left to wish. The officials of the M.V.S.N. had degrees that did not correspond to those are covered in the force discharged from the army and the thing could not weigh on the efficiency of the units.

The Greek army, like ours, was based on a wide frame, comprising nearly the totality of the units that would have had to constitute the picture of battle to the action of the mobilization, and on reduced organic, sufficient for the training and life necessity. The balanced force was of 60,000 men, of which 80% of the army. The medium yield of a class was gone around on the 45,000 men. The level of force varied from a maximum of 70-80,000 men (for eight months) to a minimum of 35-40,000 men (four months).
Organs

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of mobilization were the regiments, if it existed also in time of peace, and the center of mobilization for the units to constitute to the emergency, in kind supports of army corps and units employee from the Supreme Command. The plan of mobilization, regional in order nearly all the formations, took advantage of one classification for arm or service and classes of lever or single contingents. In relation to such card index the soldiers in dismissal were are shared in blocks countersigned by a acronym. The callback by radio or by prints means of determined acronyms made to flow the interested ones to the previewed organs of mobilization with remarkable advantage under the profile of the secrecy and that one of the rapidity of the call.

The plan in vigor in 1940 contemplated two distinguished times. Initially (20-30 days) were previewed the constitution of the Supreme Command, of two Commanders of Section of the Army and a Command of group of divisions; the completion of the five army corps, the fifteen divisions of infantry and that one of the cavalry existing; the constitution of four brigades of infantry for transformation of eleven already existing battalions, three regiments of coastal defense and the tactical and logistic supports.

In according to time (of duration from 60 to 90 days) it had to be proceeded to the constitution of four new divisions of infantry and new units of services. Major unit of second time but had a reduced organic and a limited efficiency for insufficient availability of cadre and materials. The mobilization of the infantry units regarded 56 regiments, 9 machine-gun battalions mobile or position and 35 companies of frontier or security. For the artillery:

15 divisional mountain regiments, with two groups from 75 and from 105; 4 from campaign with three groups from 75; 5 heavy with a group of 85, one of 105 and one of 155; a heavy group of 150, beyond to smaller units of varied bore and type (antitank and antiaircraft). The cavalry division, finally, mobilized with two regiments of four squadrons on horse and a motorized regiment. Moreover five squadrons existed for recon of the army corps and fifteen divisional.

The Navy had a few ships: the battleship *Averoll* of 10,000 tons, ex-armored cruiser Italian *Pisa* type; the cruiser *Helli* of 2,100 tons, antiquated and transformed to mine laying; one dozen destroyers, of which six modern ones; eight submarines; twelve torpedo boats besides several small ships for coastal service, minesweeper, etc.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The only naval base sufficiently equipped was Salamina. Consequently the operating possibilities were reduced to the defense of the arsenals of Salamina and Pireo, to the protection of the transports towards the northern frontiers and of the maritime traffic in kind, and to eventual attacks on enemy transports in the Aegean.

The Air Force had approximately three hundred aircraft, of which all but 180 were antiquated, so much so that was not previewed the strategic employment of a independent air force. The more modern aircraft were limited to 44 fighter aircrafts and 46 bombers.

Of true and own air force bases only the airport of Tatoi existed, near Athens.

2. PLAN I/B

Greece, with a development of coasts of approximately four thousand kilometers and a land border little more than thousand kilometers, was found in an uneasy geopolitical position. While in the Mediterranean sought the friendship of Great Britain and, in second request, of Italy, but above all the reconciliation with Turkey, in the Balkans had a precise interest in contrasting Bulgarian expansionism. In that discovered easy allies: all those who at the continuation of the first world war had widened their own the territory at the expenses of Bulgaria were found with common interests. Therefore the signed the Balkan pact in Athens in 1934, that it engaged the four parties (Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria) to the defense of the status quo in the comparisons of other power, in truth created understanding and solidarity between Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey against Bulgaria. The decision of the Greek General Staff to proceed to the preparation of an organic program of fortifications laughed until 1935. The government, that for a long time followed the development of the military organization of the states ended, was remained hit from the silent and effective work of Bulgarian exercises. Therefore it was decided of giving the precedence to the work on the frontiers of the eastern Macedonian and of Thrace, in how much the confidence given from Yugoslavia and Turkey allowed to neglect completely those nearly border features, while the Albanian problem appeared diminished, as in effects then it was, of the all theorist.

Since, as it has been said, until April of 1939 the attention of the Greek General Staff had been concentrated on Bulgaria, the operating guidelines were also addressed consequently. They existed

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

two plans the B3 of 1937, that was based on a war provoked and begun from Bulgaria, and the SM of the successive year, founded on the eventuality of a conflict against Bulgaria and Albania, jointly or alone, supported or not by Hungary. Evidently the strategic forecasts were tied the course of the political vicissitudes of the Balkans. In any case, both studies previewed initially a defensive attitude (were excluded an offensive war from the Greek side) and only later a counter-offensive, if naturally possible.

The defense of the frontiers assumed at once a role very distinguished: like and in that way to defend them and until that point, this was the operating problem. The surveillance and the first defense of the boarder was entrusted to a group of troops similar for tasks and organization to our Frontier Guard, articulated in *sectors* of variable force according to the delicacy of the terrain features. Since the organic of peace was sufficient only for an action of vigilance and patrolling, let alone for the garrison of the works fortified, was studied the influx of the complements, for callback, so as to be able to have on the war footing the units of cover in the short turn of a few hours. Therefore two aspects closely legacies between them: one fortification of the frontiers Albanian and Bulgarian and a deployment of susceptible safety of express increment. In 1939 the fortification system in correspondence of the Bulgarian border until to the Nesto river was practically to point, with such permanent works to resist to the action of guns from 155 and 220 and with field works of varied kind. Thrace, instead, had been interested of works essentially understood to facilitate the concrete aid that would have been supplied from Turkish troops.

The Italian disembarkation in Albania provoked very many and unfounded - at that time - worries, for which the 8th and 9th Inf. Div. were immediately placed in state of pre-alarm and releasing their commanders to proclaim the mobilization in the territory of respective jurisdiction in case they found the necessity, specifying but that during appraisal on the opportunity to give run to a serious provision therefore present kept itself the absolute necessity to avoid whichever form of provocation. In the climate of uncertainty and determined tension, the General Staff proceeded to a series of precautionary measures, which the callback of class 1939 and the predisposition of the interruptions on the main ways of communication from Albania in Macedonian and Epirus. Therefore it proceeded to the review of the operating planning. The new plan, called *plan IB* (Italy

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

and Bulgaria), was circulated 4 May 1939. It was based on the following political presupposed: the initiative of the war was attributed to Italy and/or Bulgaria; the aid of France and Great Britain was considered sure, but if not it could estimate some concrete entity.

It was lawful moreover to make confidence on the alliance with Turkey, while on Yugoslavia there was not much to count, in how much, even if had intentional to remain neutral (as probable), it would not have been difficult to force it to leave to pass through its territory Italian or Bulgarian troops.

It puts account to place in evidence the Greek caution in comparisons of Yugoslavia. This felt anything but calm that, reason for which Gen. Simovic, chief of general staff, thought opportune to sound out the Greek military attaché in Belgrade on the possibilities of a military collaboration of pure technical and not political character, without, therefore, any specific engagement. But Gen. Papagos answered of being of agreement on the common interest to exchange information with Italy; that the Yugoslavia collaboration for the study of a plan against an aggression of Italy and/or Bulgaria against Greece or Yugoslavia would have accepted very gladly or both; but that:

"it would be opportune that the two governments took estimates to come to an agreement in order to place on a political plan the basis of military collaboration"⁽¹⁾

and I take care myself to face the storm above all counting on the Turks.

Under the military profile, the base elements of the problem were shaped in this way. From the Italian side, the five divisions in Albania could anytime enter in Greece, already being on a war footing, and the sights presumably were turned against Salonika and/or Athens departing from the Korçano, given the results that the conquest of such objectives would have involved. Less probable an offensive from the Epirus was judged, closed compartment.

The Bulgarian guidelines could regard in alternative offensive in Macedonian, searching the joining with the Italian forces, or simply the engagement of numerous Greek troops. However on the attitude of Bulgaria would have much influenced that one of Turkey. In the air it was given for discounted the Italian supremacy; in sea instead that one Anglo- French.

(1) A. PAPAGOS, the war of Greece (first ed.), appendix to part I.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

That premising, having to face the fight on two foreheads, the only line of conduct that Greece could face was the defensive. In particular, to the West the abandonment of all the Epirus until to the Arachtos river and of the western Macedonian until to the connection Mt. Pindo - Mt. Vermion was previewed, not finding any more forward a series of strong and economically defensible positions. To the east it was previewed the abandonment of the territory to east of the Nesto river, exception made for, one bridgehead to Alessandropoli. Naturally the abandonment of the territory, in one and the other case, had to be contrasted from the cover forces and from other mobile units. The wings of the Greek strategic alignment, therefore, would have been leaned from a part in layers south of the Pindo and from the other by the Nesto river. The Italian problem came faced a outlined defensive line (line IB) on the positions Kaimaktsalan - Mt. Vermion pass of Hadova – bend Aliakmon r. - Venetikos r. - Mt. Orliakas - Zigos di Metsovo - Arachtos r. (sketch n. 17). Before to such alignment units deployed near the border had to act with delaying action and of wearing down, while the reserves had the task of feeding the fight in the positions of defense to the end. Moreover the possibility of a massive counterattack in the plain before Aliakmon against the flank of the Italian push on Salonika was taken in consideration.

The General Staff had examined also the worse case, than that is the pointed out measures could not come realized because of the rapidity of the enemy invasion, the effects of the aerial bombing on the road net and also for guilt of the possible slowness of the mobilization and assembled. In such eventuality the separate defense of the two sectors was accepted: Eastern Macedonian to defense of Salonika and Thessaly to protection of Athens. The articulation of the forces answered to the hypotheses on the threat: against the Italian offensive, the 8th Inf. Div. in the Epirus and the II and III Corps in western Macedonian; against the Bulgarian offensive, the Section of Army from Kavala (constituted from the IV Corps and one group of divisions) in eastern Macedonian and the V Corps in Thrace; in general reserve, the Corps in Thessaly and the reinforced 5th Inf. Div. at Salonika.

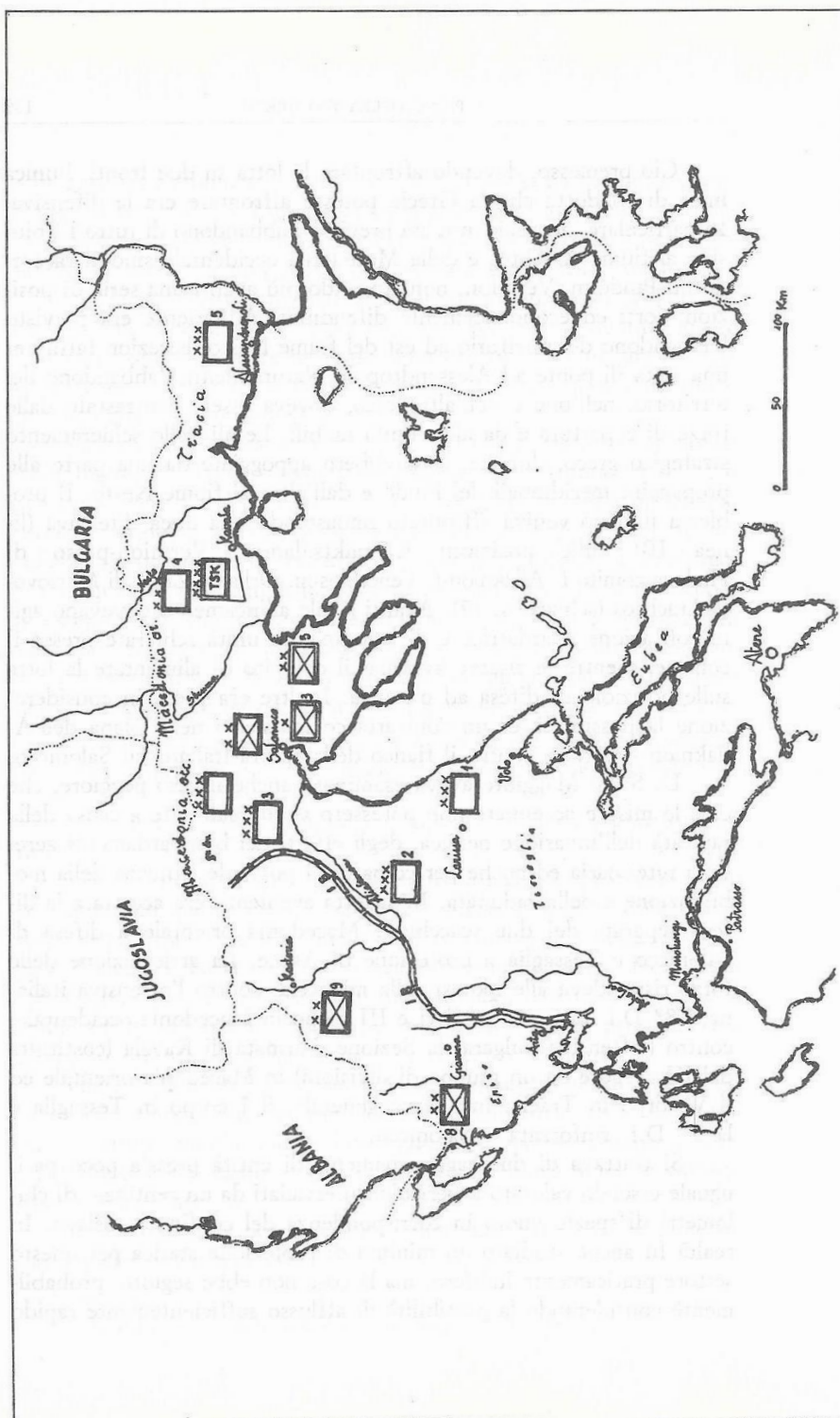
It was be a matter of two groupings of entity about near equal, equal being estimated the danger, spaced out by a hundred of kilometers of empty space in correspondence of the Yugoslavian border. In truth also a minimum of static protection for this practically defenseless field was studied, but the thing had not followed, probably considering the possibility of influx sufficiently express

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Plan IB

Schizzo n. 17

IL PIANO IB



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of the general reserve or best of the mass than maneuver. Then, Plan IB endured some modification, but for how much it only regarded the Italian front.

Undoubtedly, the decision to abandon after a simple delaying action the Epirus and western Macedonia was a brave choice, even if nearly unavoidable given those presupposed and the circumstances of the moment. However there was no better. Once defined the plan, the attention of the Greek General Staff very soon turned to the strengthen of the fortification works, passing from the Bulgarian frontier to the Albanian. All the alarmism that pervaded Greece, between the ups and downs, was sure useful to the putting to point of the national defense. The Commanders of the II Army Corps and 8th Inf. Div. took care of the particular of a plan of the interruptions and destructions that begin from the border and were studied in relation to the previewed withdraw of the covering units. And to this purpose there was another particular one of important importance: the plan of cover or, according to the official title, the "*Plan of mobilization and strengthening of the troops of cover*". Place that was wanted to be avoided whichever accusation of provocation, was necessary to resort, in case of emergency, to an hidden mobilization, therefore it had to confer a minimum of robustness to the system of guard to the frontier.

3. The PLAN I/Ba.

After the mobilization of 23 August 1939, operated to the borders of Albania in the fields of jurisdiction of the 8th and 9th Inf. Div., and as a result of the ordering and to the rearrangement conferred to the foretold G.U., the General Staff considered that some premises of Plan IB, specifically reflecting the Italian hypothesis, were changed for the better. The border with Albania was not, and it is not, orographically well traced in how much does not follow a ridge if not in the Macedonian feature. But in the Epirus, normally regarding the coming from lines of facilitation from the north the Kalamas river slides, a torrential regimen, in furrows nearly constantly deep and dominated from the uneven high shapes and of its left side, constituting a remarkable natural obstacle above all in the seasons autumn and winter. To short distance from the frontier, respective to 60 and 30 kilometers, there are the two centers of Gianina and Kastorla. The first preparations aimed to hinder more than to interdict the origins from the high Dhrinos and Vojussa valleys

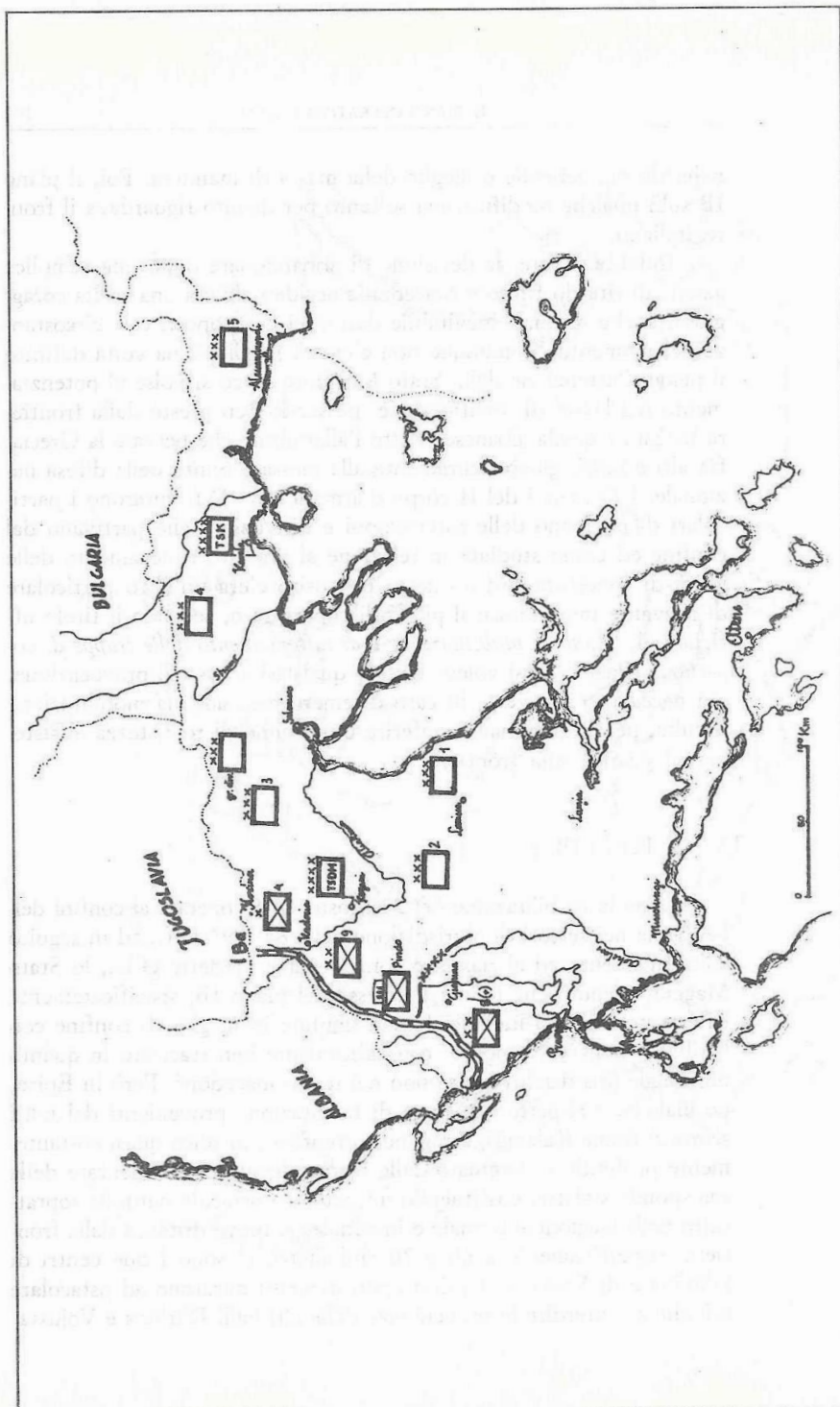
The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

Plan IBa

Schizzo n. 18

IL PIANO IBa



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

and of the Vistritsa. In kind they comprised a first order, much advanced and not continuous one, of emplacements for automatic arms and artilleries of accompaniment, elements of reticulated trench and, with greater consistency and depth to astride of the communication ways (numerous obstacles tank destroyer, predisposed interruptions of works of art and road). In the Epirus, then, it had been realized a second order of works, along the sinister river of the Kalamas, with particular with regard to the zones of Filiates, Delvinaki, Kalibaki.

Therefore the frontier began to being covered from a series of defense that, if also it does not complete, represented a susceptible outline of favorable developments operated; consequently, the assembled one of the two divisions could have place much more to north of the defensive positions which they were located; finally, Yugoslavian neutrality seems insured, and with it the threat went away on the flank of the facing forces the Korçano. For how much it precedes, the General Staff circulated on 1 September 1939 a variant to plan IB, countersigned by the IBa acronym. The presupposed one was always that the initiative of the hostilities was assumed from the enemy and that the Italian main effort was delivered from Korça towards Salonika or Athens. The strategic conception therefore was formulated: defense of the western Macedonian supported to the line Laimos - lake of Ohrida - Flatsata - Koli dag (Pyramis) - Alevitsa (the west of Nestorion); defense of Gianina supported at the Elea-Kalamas line.

The plan, in other words, renounced a priori to part of the national territory not being the positions indicated much next to the frontiers. The sectors remained distinguished. That Italian (sketch n. 18) the Epirus was divided in two fields, entrusted to the 8th Inf. Div., and the western Macedonian, entrusted to the Section of the Army with western Macedonian (SAMO)⁽²⁾, both under the direct command of the Supreme Command. The Section of army had the III Army Corps with the 4^a brigade in before formation and the 10th Inf. Div. in the second formation; of the II Army Corps with the 9th Inf. Div. in the first formation, in the second the 5^a brigade and the 1^a Inf. Div. in reserve; of the 11th Inf. Div. and one cavalry brigade in reserve; of the detachment of the Pindo, with a regiment of infantry and a group of artillery.

The Bulgarian theater was also articulated it in two fields without varying regarding the previous planning. The Eastern Macedonian

2) Equivalent to a Army Command. The Greek acronym was TSDM. In course the acronym SAMO will be used

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

it was entrusted to the Army Section of Kavala (TSK), then Army Section of eastern Macedonian (TSAM), while Thrace was held by the V Army Corps.

In general reserve remained the I Army Corps with three divisions, as well as the 5th Inf. Div., the 3rd brigade and the Cav. Div, all located in the arc from Trikkala to Salonico, that is the front of the previewed irruption from Korçano. Naturally, the entity and the alignment of the reserves placed a strong operating instrument in the hand of the Supreme Command for eventual counter-offensives, however it seems that the offensive hypothesis has been annotated to pure qualifications of eventuality, for less in 1939.

In fact, in the memorandum introduced to Gen. Metaxas dated 2 September 1939, in view of the talks at Ankara with the French, English and Turkish military exponents, Gen. Papagos wrote:

"(...) 6. If we succeed to assure the supremacy to us of our forces on those of the Italians and if we succeed to forbid or however rendering the transport of Italian troops difficult, we will be able to undertake tending offensive operations to reject from Albania the Italian army. In the worse one of the hypotheses, in case the enemy succeeds to reinforce his troops, will be able to tie down a remarkable part of the Italian Armed Forces to advantage of the allied military operations with Italy.

7. In order to be able to undertake offensive operations against Albania it is necessary to reinforce our air force.

8. Our offensive operations will have as the first objective the occupation of southern Albania. The limited number of the guide lines on which we can act will force to us to use also those departing from the Epirus. The reinforcements to this field can also be made from the Tessaglia, through Metsovo (...) "⁽³⁾.

Plan IBa allowed, however, another possibility: that one to recover intermediate solutions between the more forward, exactly called the IBa, and most rear, that is the old IB. In this picture the hinge represented from the detachment of the Pindo covered always greater importance, whose forces came slowly increased. In March of 1940 the Gen. Papagos approved of a "*general study on the military operations in the Balkans in case of extension of the war*" ⁴⁾, in which the possibilities were examined generally of the Balkan States, with a table of comparison on the armament of the division of infantry of the various armies (see the following page); and the fundamental lines of the allied maneuver in Balcania, under which aspect was

3) A. PAPAGOS, *op. cit.*, app. part I.

4) A. PAPAGOS, *op. cit.*, app. part I.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

generically supported the occupation of Albania, in the case of an Italian enemy in concert with Yugoslavia and the possible Anglo-French competition. Moreover they figured the operations to put into effect against Bulgaria, let alone the eventual operations in Yugoslavia and Rumania, very mean in aid of these last ones.

MAIN ARMAMENT OF THE DIVISION OF INFANTRY
OF THE VARIOUS ARMIES

Divisions	Sub Machine Guns	Machine Guns	mortars	accomp. artillery	artillery	
					of 75 mm.	of 100 mm. or 105 mm.
Yugoslavia	1,038	264	24	-	36 Field 12 Mtn	12 Field
Romania	336	112	18	-	36 Field	24 Field.
Bulgarian:						
- quaternary	345	182	24	-	24 Field	12 Field.
- ternary	264	146	18	-	16 Field	8 Field
Turkish	336	87	18	12	from 36 to 40	
Greek	336	112	12	6	16 Mtn	8 Mtn
Italian	216	48	108 of 45 mm. 24 of 81 mm.	8	24 Field	12 Field
Notes: - the relative data for the Balkan armies are those cited from the study of the Greek General Staff; - the relative data to the Italian division hold account of the camicie nere legion (of all the eventual) and the automatic arms of units for close defense.						

The study concluded with a chapter concerning the operations against Albania, having as goal "*the annihilation of the forces*"

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Italians in the shortest possible time". Given its character and the concepts that inspired it, and that they will find partial application during the war, if of filler extract:

"1. While against Bulgaria we will have to assume the initiative of the state of war and the hostilities, against Albania, instead, we will have at first to attend supervising and to leave Italy the initiative of the war declaration.

2. Not being possible to know the forces of which Italy will deploy in Albania at the moment of the beginning of the hostilities, the troops cannot, consequently, be calculated that we will have to engage against Albania.

3. Probably, we will lack initially numerical superiority, we will be forced at first to hold on to the defensive.

4. Held account that our attempt will be that to undertake, weather permitting, an offensive aimed to throw into the sea the Italian forces, ours beginning defensive actions must have characteristic following:

a) to yield to the enemy the minimum possible of national territory;

b) to assure, possibly, a favorable line of departure for us, (if necessary, in Albanian territory) for our successive counter-offensive (...).

6. These offensive operations against Albania will have to be carried out with vigor on all main guidelines, so that the result is quick and total. It will be necessary not to allow the enemy to maneuver for taking advantage of inner lines of the wide possibilities offered from the land, and will be necessary give them no time to receive reinforcements from Italy.

7. The offensive operations against Albania introduce initially two alternatives that although connected in strategic field, have a clear independence. They are: from the Greek territory against southern Albania; from the territory Yugoslavian against Northern Albania (...)

After all: the actions of the Epirus will aim at the occupation of Valona and the territory at south of such locality; the actions of the western Macedonian will stretch to the occupation of Durazzo (...).

As it can be well seen, Greece tried frantically to find allies: against Bulgaria Turkey was sufficient, but against Italy it estimated necessary of Yugoslavia. The Greek General Staff could not imagine the approximation of foreign and military politics of the fascist regimen.

The beginning of spring 1940 found the Greek army in the normal centers of peace. They were under arms four groups of soldiers: the second contingent of 1938, the two of 1939 and the first one of 1940.

The first three already had been trained. At the border were found the VIII sector of frontier (Gianina), IX (Florina) and IX bis (Kastoria).

In April it was decided them the callback to service for a month the groups,

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of reserve officers of the several arms and services. In May it began the callback of the classes from 1935 and later. To tell the truth, the General Staff had proposed provisions secure of greater engagement, but the government did not ever have acceded to the demands for economy reasons. On the first of June 1940 it only provided itself to reorder the organic of the Commands of high rank; to partial callbacks and a series of local recognitions in order to test the correspondence of the planning in the various hypotheses and to render it familiar to the responsible framework. On 17 August began the true and own a methodical mobilization - supported from the full consent of the population - also with the attention and the precaution suggested from the situation, in special way regarding the Commands and the units interested to cover Albania. At the end of the month, in a strip on the Epirus and Macedonia border they were on the following units on a war footing:

8th Inf. Div.; 10 battalions, of which 3 of frontier;

9th Inf. Div.; 6 battalions, of which 1 of frontier;

3rd brigade: 5 battalions, of which 1 of frontier;

5th brigade: 3 battalions;

1st Inf. Div.: 4 battalions

for a total of 28 battalions and a group of forty batteries of varied bore.

Two particular points formed object of the study: the obstruction of the strait of Preveza and the defense of Pindo. The first one had connection with the tactical problem of the Epirus. In 1939 the issue had been set aside estimating little probable a Italian disembarkation. This time, instead, was given run to some provisions tending to prevent light ships access to the gulf of Amvrakia, with the laying of mines in the channel, the realization of a bridge of boats and a anti-ship defense arms from ambo sides of the strait. To keep in mind who the measures for Preveza re-entered in relative operations plan to the coastal defense and called IBb.

According to aspect it had fundamental importance. The Pindo was element of subdivision between Epirus and western Macedonia, but also a splice between the defense of the two fields. It achieved two orders of measures: the mobilization in place with reserve personnel of the zone, and the strengthening of the detachment since from the time of peace (were carried to two battalions with one mountain battery and one cavalry squadron). Finally the possibility was examined to operate from the Pindo against the left flank of the adversary proceeding on the Gianina and to such scope it was previewed the participation of the 1st Inf.Div.,

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

initially located in the zone of Metsovo and to mostly employed for tactical groupings to the level of regiment or battalion, with mountain batteries. A single position was to be defended to the last: the pass of Metsovo. For this it was decided with of provisions that allowed to maintain to the sure tactical communication between the forces operating on the Pindo and those to its sides: the 8th D.f., probably obliged to retreat from the line of the Kalamas until to the course of the Arachtos, and, to the east, major unit operating in western Macedonian, for which also a possible regression on successive positions (T2, 3 T and T 4) between the border and the Aliakmon river was previewed (sketch n. 19)

In September released the orders for the best application of the plans, as well as under the aspect of the starting alignment as much as under the profile of the expectable development of the first operations. To the General Staff it turned out that the bulk of the Italian troops was concentrated on the Epirus front, with the obvious purpose to invade the region acting along the few and bad lines of communication. In the Korçano they had been characterizes units of insufficient consistency, even if the forecast of a influx could be nourished of reinforcements, but all adding could not have that intentions of a static defense. In the intermediate zone of Erseke - location of the *Julia* - they had been assessed "*equal forces to the about to a regiment of mountain infantry with tanks, motorcyclists and artillery of limited offensive possibilities*⁽⁵⁾", and therefore aiming probably to assure the possession of the Korça-Leskoviku castling, before the occupation of some positions of border. On the base of these elements the General Staff was convinced of the possibility and convenience to face the conflict in western Macedonian line up with offensive advanced to line IBa and being exercised aimed in order to lighten the pressure indirectly the 8th Inf. Div.; in the Epirus realizing a strongly defense line on the Kalamas, but leaving the 8th Inf. Div. the freedom of conduct until to the more rear line of the Arachtos; with the Pindo holding at all costs the summit of Metsovo.

The SAMO had to arrive at two results not just possible: to deprive the enemy of the most favorable lines of departure for the attack in the valley them of the Upper Devoli (to north of the Grammos and east of the Morova), conquering moreover good outlets for the successive counter-offensive

5) Greek S.M.E., op cit., vol. I, paragraph. 86. The characterized mechanized units evidently were a part of the *Centauro* in the Vojussa valley.

Schizzo n. 19

[illegible]

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

and to interrupt, or at least to hinder, the traffic on the Korça – Erseke - Leskov artery. Since Italy would have taken the initiative, sure the two results would not have been attainable if not acting as soon as any propitious circumstance was offered, without to attend the concentration of all the mobilization forces. Only after that it sets in action premises had improved the tactical picture, it could be passed to the determined attack of the Morova for the control of the road junction of Korça.

For how much, then, it concerned the left wing of the SAMO, depended a lot on the situation in which the 8th Inf. Div. would have been found the fundamental alternatives, in short, they were but two each introduced various possibilities.

The static defense could overwhelm gap between the detachment of the Pindo and the right of the 8th Inf. Div. during the withdraw of this, searching the continuity of the long defense the alignment Smolika m.- Metsovo, or the long alignment Gamela m. - Metsovo, that is on the ridges between which the Aoo slides.

The dynamics reaction concurred to be useful for the passage in order to throw itself on the Italian main column proceeding along the Premeti – Elea - Gianina direction.

In the field of the 8th Inf. Div. things they were simpler. On 21 September it had been authorized to proceed to the requisition of draft animals for mobilizing the 24th infantry and the 40th euzone. On the 27th could carry all the units on the war foot. The same day the General Staff confirmed freedom of action between the two lines of defense in relation to the events, with the only tie, in case of forced withdraw to south the of Gianina, to at least detach three battalions with two batteries - rather than a single battalion, as previewed - in order to block the Gianina - Metsovo direction. In the above-mentioned eventuality such grouping had to pass to the orders of the SAMO. On 5 October the division received the orders before the beginning of the hostilities.

The mobilization being already completed, and of the par almost completed the deployment of the units on the positions of the Kalamas, became useless resistance in place of the cover forces. Consequently they had to limit themselves to give the alarm and to slow down the Italian advance without to let hold.

A few days later the Cody it put to disposition of the 8th Inf. Div. the 39th euzone and numerous batteries of varied bore of the 15th Inf. Div. not still mobilized, let alone three machine-gun companies supplied from the regiments of infantry of the same division. It was by now to allow itself of completed unit or mobilization *ex novo* in all the theaters.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

To hold present but, to explain the difficulty of reconstruction of the Greek picture of battle from part of our intelligence, that often were only mobilized parts of the various regiments of infantry and artillery.

After 20 October the news from the foreign country made to comprise that the fatal moment was approaching. The minister of Greece in Rome, on 23 October telegraphed:

"the voices for an imminent attack against of us continue. Information of military source indicate the date of the beginning of the action against Greece between the 25th and the 28th of this month. Politis".

And two days later the minister of Greece at Berna informed:

"According to information coming from Berlin the attack against Greece is issue of days. Psaroudas".

At Athens, therefore, it was lived in expectation. An active waiting:

"But also Greece is not unprepared. And sufficiently armed for opposition to the Italian invasion, since the measures of partial mobilization assumed between 23 August and 27 October 1940 concurred to carry on war personnel the units destined to support for the first weight of the Italian attack, until when, completed the assembly, would not be taken part in the fight also the remaining units previewed in the mobilization plan.

The forces, all in the first formation, that constituted the barrier against the Italian aggression, were the following:

- the 8th division reinforced in the Epirus, with 15 battalions, 16 batteries and a recon group. The division was destined to face far superior enemy forces in infantry in the coastal, strip little remaining of the front; [for against it was inferior] in way crushing in artilleries, tanks and aviation in all the sectors;

- the detachment of the Pindo, composed of two battalions, one battery and one cavalry squadron. On the front to it the Italian superiority was introduced important, with a relationship of 3 to 1 for infantry and 5 to 1 for artillery;

- the 9th division and the IV brigade in the western Macedonian in which the Greek forces they had a sure superiority on those Italians, since amounted to 22 battalions, 22 batteries and a recon group"⁽⁶⁾.

Not connected with the fact that the Greeks could with just satisfaction recognize of to be sufficiently ready, while from Italian side it is quite pleonastic to admit insufficient preparation, is possible now to resume the comparison between the opposing alignments,

6) Greek S.M.E., op. cit., vol. I, para. 94.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

only considering the units of infantry indicated in the first formation from the Greek General Staff:

in Epirus: 15 Greek battalions, without to count the units of position, against 24 Italians, comprised 6 of *camicie nere* of which it has been said of their reduced efficiency;

on the Pindo: 2 Greek battalions against 5 Italians;

in western Macedonian: 22 Greek battalions against 16 Italians including one machine-gun, one of *carabinieri* and one of *camicie nere*.

In total, 39 Greek battalions against 45 Italians. In the short at the end of a week the Greek High Command will begin to gradually introduce into the fight the I and II Army Corps, the cavalry division, besides smaller units already in motion or in reserve. We will arrive the remaining 5 battalions of the *Venezia* and, when it arrives by forced march, at the *Arezzo*.

4. THE ALIGNMENT ON 28 OCTOBER.

Before pointing out the Greek alignment at dawn of 28 October, clarification is opportune. The Greek defensive predispositions referred to a complex of measures understood to oppose first, as much as more valid possible, resistance to the invasion in order to allow the mobilization of the entire army that, for begun that it was, was not at all complete when the hostilities began. Consequently, the forces lined up on the lines IBa and IB (sketch n. 20) constituted simply the *cover* and therefore, on one side the formulation of the defense could not have the orthodox character of continuity and depths from the doctrine, something else the operating dependencies of the troops were temporary. The total consistency of the units was however such to assure in place a sufficiently valid resistance, second the Greek calculations (and in fact it were). And also to emphasize that on IBa positions - ahead to which had preliminarily to act a type of group of emergency pre-cover called, with the task to delay the Italian advance without but engaging themselves to the end - they were regiments located not always complete or single battalions, in how much remaining of the unit was still being completed or was located more to the rear, on line IB or in the reserve.

It appears obvious therefore as the refining of the defense after

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the first combats, the succession of the orders, changing by hand by hand of appearance of the device, evolution of the articulation of command are from looking at themselves much in tight dependency of the development of the events more than a plan realized in times and are made very programmed since from the period of peace. True it is that neither the more optimistic Greeks would have dared to hope what is happened. That premised one, filler of continuation the deployment of the Greek G.U. in first formation at the beginning of conflict⁽⁷⁾.

In the Epirus area one found the 8th Inf. Div. (Gen. Katsimitros), reinforced by the 3rd brigade and several units. In advanced position it had a group of pre-cover constituted from four battalions assigned, to the term of their action of wearing down, to being employed in the respective rear area of the defensive position.

The defensive position was articulated in three area: of Thesprothia, of the Kalamas and Negrades. In part, the coastal area of Preveza.

It seems opportune to confer particular prominence to the accommodation of the land in the Elea - Kalibaki zone in which they were concentrated nearly all the work carries out on the Albanian frontier from 1939 to 1940, to obstruction of the road net of Kakavia and Perati. On the whole there had been constructed 66 km of trench of the medium depth of 1.30 m.; approximately 6 km of barbed wire fence with two lines; 31 emplacements for artilleries, complete of revetments and serving shelters for, able to resist to the grenades from 105 mm.; 289 emplacements for machine-guns, of which 20 in cliff, in a position to resisting to the blows from 75 mm.; 110 protected shelters for infantry platoon and 10 observatories. As tank destroyer measures had been realize wide ditches four meters and equally deep if not more, obstructions with fragments of railway railroad, pulled down of tree log, live mined. All the art works moreover had been mined (and all jumped punctually). The Elea locality, where the two roadways were combined, best known under the name of Kalibaki, was controlled from a semicircle of heights optimally prepared for a defense to the last, even if this, as we know, it was not the intention of the Supreme Command, and represented the heart of the defensive organization for the protection of Gianina.

In western Macedonian, the SAMO (Gen. Pitsikas) had the 9th Div. Inf. (Gen. Ziguris), the 4th reinforced brigade (Gen. A. Metaxas) and the detachment of the Pindo (Col. Davakis). Each of

(7) Greek S.M.E., op: cit., vol. II: *L'offensiva italiana* (28 October - 13 November 1940), page 8 and following..

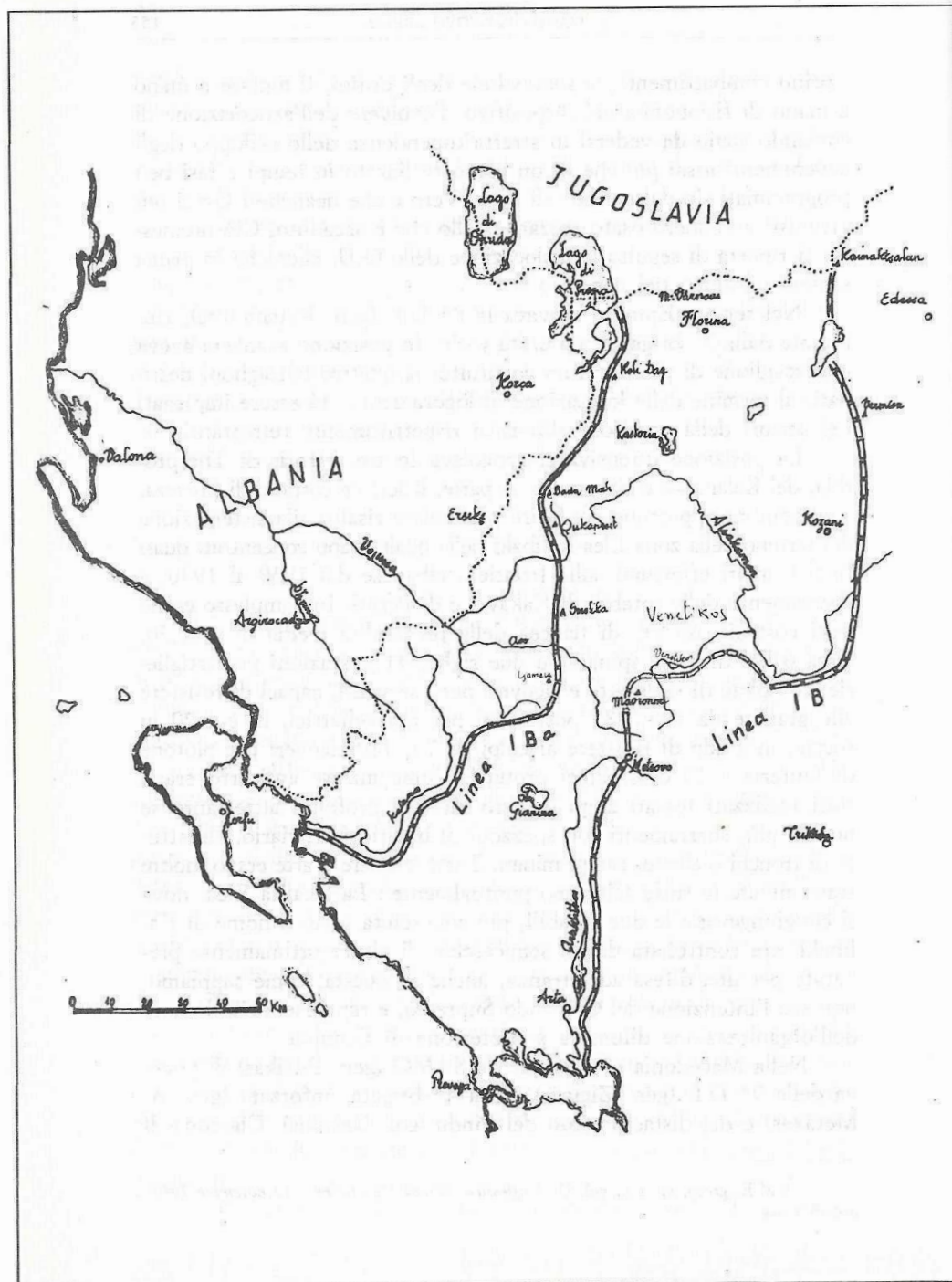
The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

Greek defensive lines

Schizzo n. 20

LE LINEE DIFENSIVE GRECHE



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

these units had the responsibility of their own area. did not exist A true and proper group of pre-cover in how much the IBa line found itself to shelter, nearly everywhere, of the frontier.

Besides to these forces, the influx was predisposed, quickest possible than other units in order to help the withdraw of the first group or in order to reinforce it in native place: seven battalions and four batteries between Metsovo and Servia (south-east of Kozane), another seven battalions and eight sections of artillery of the 10th and 11th divisions and of the 5th brigade, between Kastoria and Edessa.

For the Bulgarian theater, to the Commander of the Section of the Army of eastern Macedonian nothing was modified regarding the previous directives and to the thereby destined force. Only the begun of the war, and therefore with a sure clarity in the international picture, Greece will reach to this pool, but limitedly to the reserves of the the Supreme Command located in the zone of Salonicco.

In the inside of the country they were still in the allocating centers, and with organic of peace, the three divisions of the army corps (2nd of Atene, 3rd of Patrasso and 4th of Nauplia), the 5th of Candia, of Larissa (the army corps) and the division with cavalry with Salonicco: all forces under direct command of the Supreme Command.

On the logistic plan they had been established the following supplies: 15-17 days of provisions and 30 days of forage and fodder; 45 days of fuel; 7- 8 *unfoc* for the mountain artilleries, 8-9 for that heavy field and 6-7 for those heavy ones. Quantitative, meant well, for the greater part conserved in the territorial and central depots. For as much as it has drawn to the equipments of the units in ammunition fact, was: been assigned the not following units of fire: 2 and half for artilleries and 5-6 for the automatic arms and individual, while for the works the *unfoc* relative to the artilleries they amounted to 10.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

156
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CHAPTER VI

THE ITALIAN OFFENSIVE (28 October -9 November)

1. THE OFFENSIVE IN THE EPIRUS AREA.

The evening of Sunday 27 October the units of the Ciamuria Army Corps was waiting at the frontier, from the valley of Vojussa to m. Sarakin, while the Command of the Corps moved itself from Delvino to Frastani, in Dhrinos valley, a few kilometers from Kakavia⁽¹⁾. A few hours later, between 05:30 and 06:00 of the 28th, the troops left the lines of departure (sketch n. 21).

In the Vojussa-Dhrinos area the dispositions was articulated on four columns of maneuver nearly concentrically on the road net of Kalibaki. The two headquarters were in charge of the breach of the defense. On the left the Trizio column, based on the 47th Inf., followed the direction of Lakanokastro- Jerosplatanos (Alizoti)-Mesovouni-q. 1090 to east of Kalibaki, with objective of eventual attack m. Vigla and q. 1090⁽²⁾. To right the Sapienza column, based on the 48th Inf., along the direction Kakavia-Delvinaki - Kalibaki with objective of attacking Krioneri and eventual Paliokastro⁽³⁾. In other words, to the two columns was granted a waited before proceeding to the true attack of the Greek positions.

To the left extreme the Solinas column acted, that is a battlegroup of the *Centauro*, astride of Perati-Kalibaki roadway Bridge,

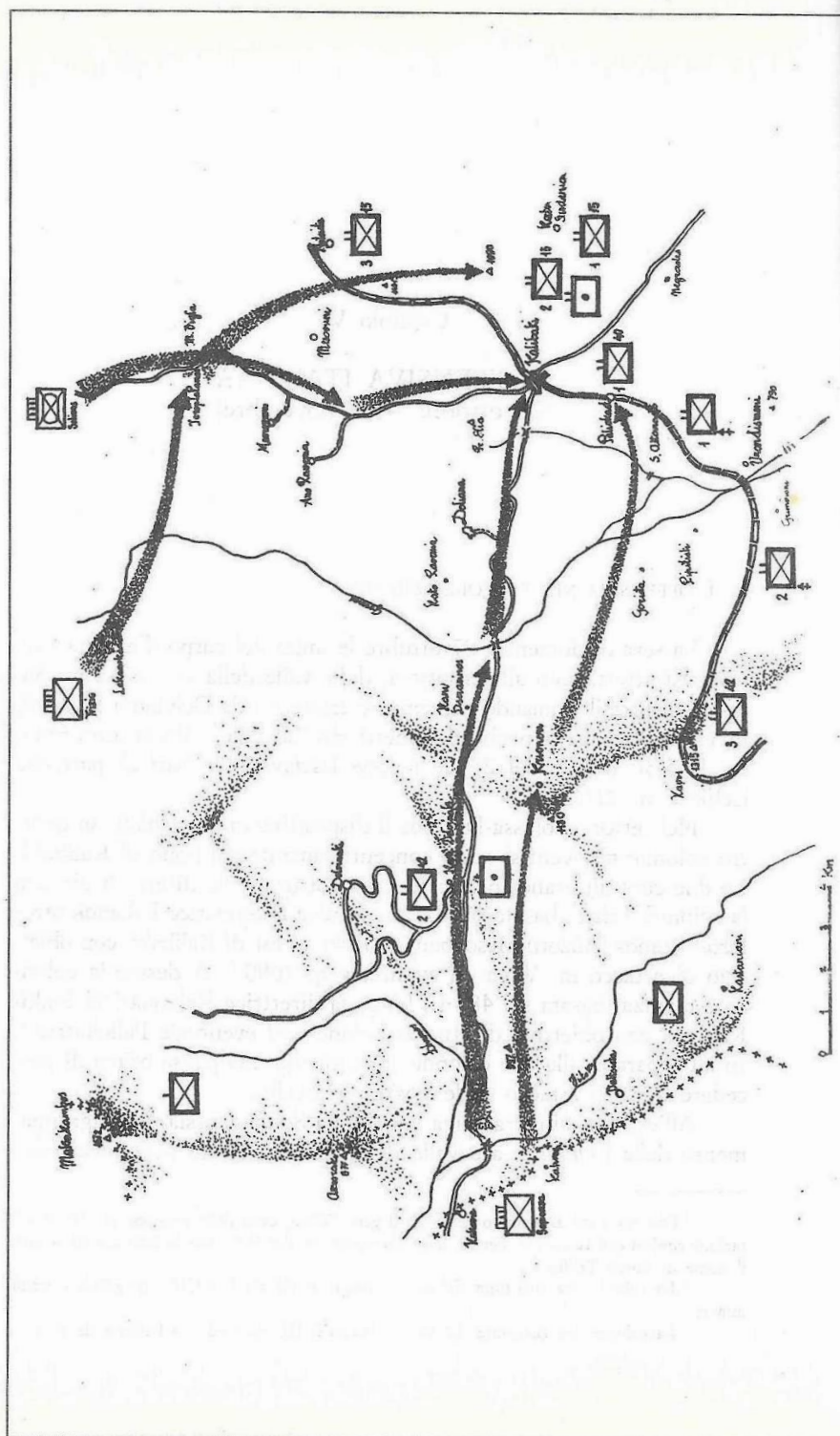
1) Here had been assassinated in 1923 Gen. Tellini, head of the mission for the marking out borders with Greece. Therefore, after the occupation of 1939, the locality it had been given the name of Tellini Village.

2) The column was constituted of the 47th Inf. (less III bn.), III/14th artillery and smaller units.

3) The column was constituted from the 48th Inf. (less the III bn.) and one 75/13 battery.

Schizzo n. 21

GLI ORDINI PER L'ATTACCO A KALIBAKI (28 OTTOBRE 1940)



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

in order to allow to the effort of the 47th Inf.⁽⁴⁾. Further back, a center column of maneuver astride the Kakavia-Delvinaki-Kalibaki roadway. It was composed of the divisional reserve and the bulk of the artillery⁽⁵⁾.

As then the Gen. Visconti Prasca expressed, "*the connection of the troops of the Ciamuria A.C. went ahead on the enemy. That allowed advance quickly and without worry for the flanks*". In effects sensitive resistances were not previewed in the beginning and the greater thought, at least until to Kalibaki, was that one to get hold of the bridges intact. Unfortunately only the Perati bridge, occupied immediately, and a successive one at Burazani was conquered before the Greeks had blown them up. All the others were interrupted and that will be accordingly serious inconvenient in the bed weather.

The Greek covering forces were composed of the reinforced Konitsa frontier Bn. and by the I/15th Inf. in correspondence of the Perati-Kalibaki roadway Bridge; of the reinforced Delvinaki frontier Bn. and by the II/42nd euzoni on the Kakavia-Kalibaki director.

Said units had the task to delay the Italian advance towards Kalamas offering the forward resistance understood to earn time. The rear position of resistance was articulated in three fields: Negrades, Kalamas and Thesprotia. Only the first one and part of the second was directly interested to the defense to the end of the road net of Kalibaki. The Negrades field was entrusted to the 15th Inf., reinforced by the I/40th Inf. and the mobile mtr. Bn.; to the south-east of the Grimbiani sub sector (of the Kalamas field) was held by the III/42nd euzoni and the II mobile mtr. Bn..

The Italian advance found the first obstacle at the defilade of Hani Delvinaki in the late morning of the 28th, but it was exceeded after short combat and to the falling of the evening the Lakanokastro- Krioneri alignment was reached. The day after Jeroplatanos was occupied by the Trizio column and the head of the Solinas column (the bersaglieres and the Albanian cc.nn.) while the engineers worked feverishly to the repair of the interruptions and anxious to construct on the Vojussa a porter bridge of boats in order to allow the passage of the artillery and of

4) The column was constituted from 5th Bers Command, XIV/5th Bers., III/31st tank, II/1st legion cc.nn. Albanian, I/131st artillery, XIX/26th artillery and minor units.

5) The column was constituted from the division Command, III/47th Inf., III/48th Inf., I/1st legion cc.nn., 166th Bn. cc.nn. *Piemonte*, gr. sqd. *Guide*, XXIII Bn. 81 mm mortars (less one company), 14th artillery (less a group), 26th army corps artillery (less two groups) and minor units.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

baggage train. The *Ferrara* had while adapted its own dispositions, reinforcing the Sapienza column with the III/47th, the III/48th and the 166th Bn. cc.nn. *Piemonte* for the movement on Paliokastro. The central column was attested, instead, to the river Gormos. The arrest essentially had another interruption and this more serious time of the previous ones: the bridge on the Gormos measured forty of meters, with four arches. In part, however, the bad meteorological conditions, that began to weigh and that they were provoking an abnormal broadening of the water course, all to torrential regimen, the situation on the whole according to the forecasts introduced and Gen. Rossi, considered still possible a breakthrough in the Negrades area, circulated the order for the prosecution of the effort on the Gianina to successful occupation of the crossroad of Kalibaki.

The morning of the 30th the head of the Solinas column passed to the orders of the *Ferrara*, melting itself with the Trizio column. The remains of the Solinas grouping remained blocked on the right of the Vojussa because the sudden start of the current had dragged away the porter and the bridge of boats laboriously prepared by the engineers. On the other hand the bulk of the *Centauro*, in second formation, was stuck on the Fitoki for the lacked arrival of engineer units. At the center Doliana was occupied, while to south the Doliana column slowly proceeded in the swampy land between the Gormos and the Kalamas, under a driven rain. Nearly all the Greek units of the pre-cover group were withdrawn.

On 31 October at 10:00 – the fixed hour in relation to the previewed air support, that unfortunately again lacked - the *Ferrara* resumed the action. The device comprised two strong central columns of attack. That one of left, from Doliana for Profeta Elia, aimed at the north flank of the defilade of Kalibaki; that one of right had to exceed Kalamas and to reach Paliokastro. Still more on the left the Trizio column, with which radio connection had been interrupted - and it remained such for some time - had to continue, according to the orders given, on Mesovouni and hill 1,201. For all the day the troops advanced slowly under artillery fire that, also not being very thick, turned out studied and very effective. Pieces were accurately masked or in cavern and escaped to the location, such that on the points of obliged passage and in the features discoveries the fire harvested numerous victims among the attackers. In addition to the greater capacity of the Greek batteries, that finding itself beyond the throw of our batteries they could not be counter-battery. The widening of the front of the attack and the arm of the encircling was prevailed.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

task to carry out the breach was then entrusted to the *Centauro* along the Hani Dseravinas-Ripitisti direction, keeping itself to south of the roadway of Kalibaki.

The day of 1 November, while the weather stretched to improve, was used in order to make to advance medium tanks and the Army Corps artilleries a lot remained behind. The state of the roads, slimy mud and in some features collapse, of difficult transit in the points in which they were crossed from the small torrents, and the apparitions of Greek aircraft that disturbed the repair work rendered the movement very slow and onerous.

The morning of the 2nd preparations were completed, the discreet time.

The action must have had beginning at 08:00, after intense aerial bombing on the enemy positions. It instead began with remarkable delay and without the air support (that it was introduced after 10:00 and in limited measure). The *Centauro* moved therefore to the attack with three close columns of progressively increasing force from left towards the right. The passage of the Kalamas in the zone of S. Attanasio would have concurred the turning of the southern flank of Kalibaki. The *Ferrara* had to facilitate the maneuver persisting in the frontal action. The engagement, the tenacity, the impulse of all the units was truly admirable but the progresses was slow, too much slow. The movement difficulties persisted on the road and off the road, more and more precise and deadly became the fire of the Greek artilleries that was not succeeded to characterize and therefore to neutralize. The evening of the 2nd the situation was almost unchanged: the Kalamas had not been exceeded nor the position of resistance damaged. Decided to persist in the attack on the 3rd, bringing back the center of the effort in correspondence of Kalibaki, with a strong column of the *Centauro*. To the south a unit of the same division they would have still pressed towards Negrades, to north the *Ferrara* continued in its attack against hill 1,090.

Means insufficiency (artillery, wagons, material from bridge) and some errors of employment did not allow the attainment of appreciable a concrete result. The continuation, or better the reiteration of the attack was previewed for the next day the 4th, but to this point the Comando Superiore took part in order to concur a better organization of the effort. But the action had been strong and the Commander of the 8th Greek division evidently feared not to be further able to resist on the positions of Grimbiani because it was decided to withdraw to the east of the Kalamas the units of the foretold sub sector and the contiguous, on positions already previously studied. Therefore in the night

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

on the 4th, the 42nd euzoni and 40th euzoni were withdrawn on the left of the water course.

On the Kalamas acted the *Siena* reinforced by the *Guide* regiment and units of the army had to operate. On 28 October it was lined up between Delvino and Konispoli in a area distinctly mountainous and lacking in a roadway.

This imposed a series of provisions begins in order to allow the overcoming of specific difficulties: construction and improvement of muleteer, throwing of bridges on the numerous torrents, constitution of an advanced depot of provisions and ammunitions, requisition and organization of numerous Albanian baggage trains, etc. It was obvious, but, than the preparations began however they could not have had adequate continuation action during for organic logistic deficiencies.

On the front of the *Siena*, in correspondence of the medium course and low Kalamas, the southern part of the Greek position of resistance was found, it is worth to say the sub sectors Granitsopoulo and Vrusine of the Kalamas area, and the area Thesprotia (Gen. Ljuba), extended from Mt. Ambelia, extended, to the sea.

More to the south, in the region of Ambrakis, a field Preveza-Filippiade (Col. Papadopoulos) had been organized, with the I/24th infantry reinforced and a cp. of the II mobile machine-gun Bn., but to the explosion of the hostilities, when the greater danger appeared towards the Kalamas, these units were moved in order to go to reinforce the Thesprotia area.

On 28 October, at 06:15 under cover of fog, the *Siena* left the lines of departure. Exceeding isolated resistances to the evening it reached Raveni with the 31st Inf. and Filiates with the 32nd Inf. The day after at 08:00, the columns resumed the movement, but all the motor vehicles and the greater part of the artilleries had to remain in the zone of Konispoli, awaiting that the mule track until to Sajada was transformed into a roadway. Unavoidably the insufficiency of baggage train caused feeding difficulties that increased hand by hand that the regiments proceeded into Greek territory. In these conditions the advance was very slow and laborious and ended in order to arrest itself at the Kalamas, whose bridges had been blown and along which the line of Greek resistance ran. The division was not only found in the material impossibility to pass the water course, difficulties and in total lack of materials adapted to the goal; but feeling the effects of serious logistic embarrassments.

From 1 to 4 November the preparation for the forcing of the Kalamas had therefore place, operation that unfortunately it indicated as the

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

calendar of the times was already compromise. On 2 November Visconti Prasca sent to the *Siena* the following message:

"The pause on Kalamas is depended from the overflowing of the river and it is not a tactical pause. As soon as the passage of the river is possible, the march forward must be resumed until in cross-country exceeding every obstacle of enemy and every land and other difficulty. To remember itself that every battalion meeting a division must eventually attack in depth with its commander at the head and with division commander at the head of the first battalion".

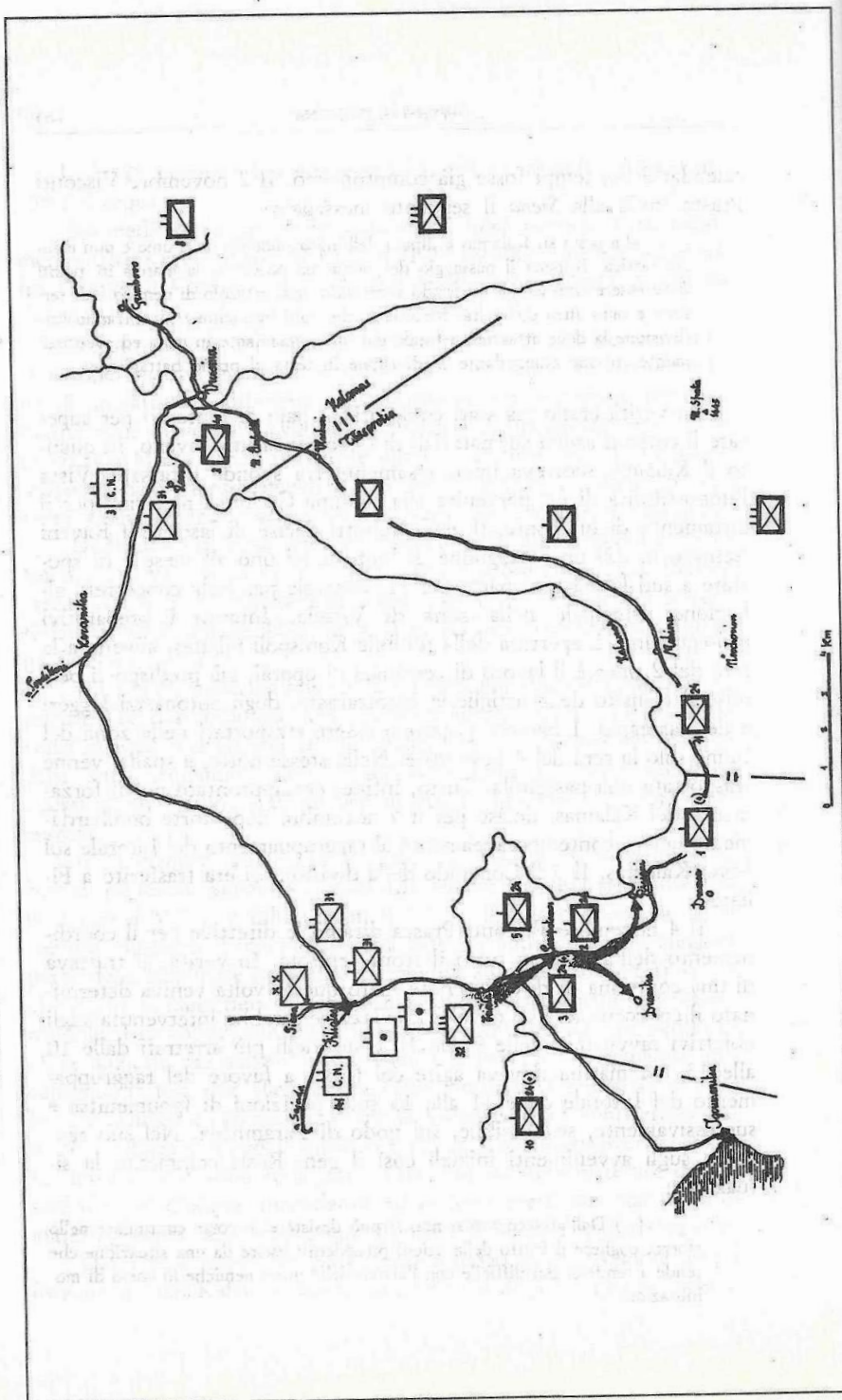
In truth already they had been completed a pair of attempts in order to exceed the water course on circumstance materials, but in vain, in how much the Kalamas slid impetuously between embedded sides. Seen the impossibility to make to get to the Carloni column the materials to throw a bridge, Gen. Gabutti determined to leave Raveni (diagram n. 22) a battalion of infantry and one Albanian and to move south with the greater part of the 31st infantry for make to concur to the main action in the zone of Vrisela. While the preparations continued. The opening of the Konispoli-Filiates roadway, happened the evening of the 2nd, thanks the work of hundred of laborers, already predisposed allowed the transit of the horse drawn artilleries, the light motor vehicles and the baggage. The barges could be transport in the zone of the river only the evening of 4 November. In the same night, to the flank, was transported a footbridge. All, finally, it was prepared for the forcing of the Kalamas, decided for 5 November after heavy aerial bombing, at the same time to the Litorale grouping on the lower Kalamas. On the 3rd the Commander of the division had moved himself to Filiates.

On 4 November Visconti Prasca circulated the directives for the coordination of the action on the entire Epirus front. In truth, it was a matter of a confirmation of well known directives, but this time came determined the aerial and naval co-operation. The Air Force would take part on close objects from 09:00 to 10:00 and on those further away from 10:00 to 13:00. The Navy had to act with the fire to favor of the Litorale grouping from 11:00 to 13:00 on the positions of Igoumenitsa and, if subsequently possible, on the road net of Paramithia. In his report on the events he begins therefore with Gen. Rossi's comment on the situation:

"(...) Of the attack by now it cannot be desisted from: it is necessary to continue in the effort, to pick the fruit of the previous actions; to exit from a situation that stretches to become more difficult with the arrival of the enemy units in course of mobilization".

Schizzo n. 22

IL FORZAMENTO DEL KALAMAS DA PARTE DELLA D.F. «SIENA» (5-7 NOVEMBRE)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

On 5 November the action resumed on the entire Epirus front. For this new effort Gen. Rossi had modified the tasks and deployments (sketches n. 23 and 24).

The *Centauro* was in charge to smash in between Kalibaki and Paliokastro. For this purpose it had to proceed spanning the roadway for Gianina, being supported on the right from a column that from Paliokastro was in charge reach Negrades, passing bridge of S. Attanasio. In reserve the reconstituted Solinas column, but on which the Commander of the Army Corps it placed an employment tie, not available, other, than of that one reserves.

The *Ferrara* had to facilitate the action of breach of the *Centauro* and to guarantee the flanks of the successive penetration. On the left the 47th Inf. had the task to occupy hill 1.090 and to continue then on Kato Sudenia and hill 1.134. For its right the 48th Inf. it had to head at Mt. Vurtopa in order to make to fall the northern flank of the defense of Kalibaki and then to continue keeping itself to north of the roadway for Gianina. More to the south a tactical group of the 48th Inf. had to pass the S. Attanasio bridge (after the *Centauro*), to garrison it and to continue towards Ligopsa. The *Guide* would instead have watched the divisional right against origins from the south, keeping themselves in the zone of Goritsa.

From the Greek side, while the High command was disposed to consider with a sure elasticity the conduct line to follow in Epirus, in waited for that got rid the situation on the Pindo - remaining firm the absolute engagement to hold the pass of Metsovo tightly -, the commander of the 8th division, approval the course of the first actions and the existing force ratio, decided to insist in the defense on the line of the Kalamas, less than a threat than a turning it did not force him to abandon Kalibaki.

At 10:00 of 5 November, come to lack the previewed air support until to such hour, the Italian columns put in motion. The progresses, one were, since from the beginning, slow and found it hard because of the optimal organization of the fire from the Greek side. Some success took place here and there, (lines not on the desired level. In particular, the *Centauro* could not play its card, being itself found ahead to insurmountable obstacles for it. The left column, tanks and bersaglieres, had been arrested in front of three orders of beams of iron arranged in correspondence of a wide ditch, all in marshy zone. The right column had met orientation difficulty and to the end it had gotten bogged down on the sides of the Kalamas.

The situation began is made heavy, not so much for the losses

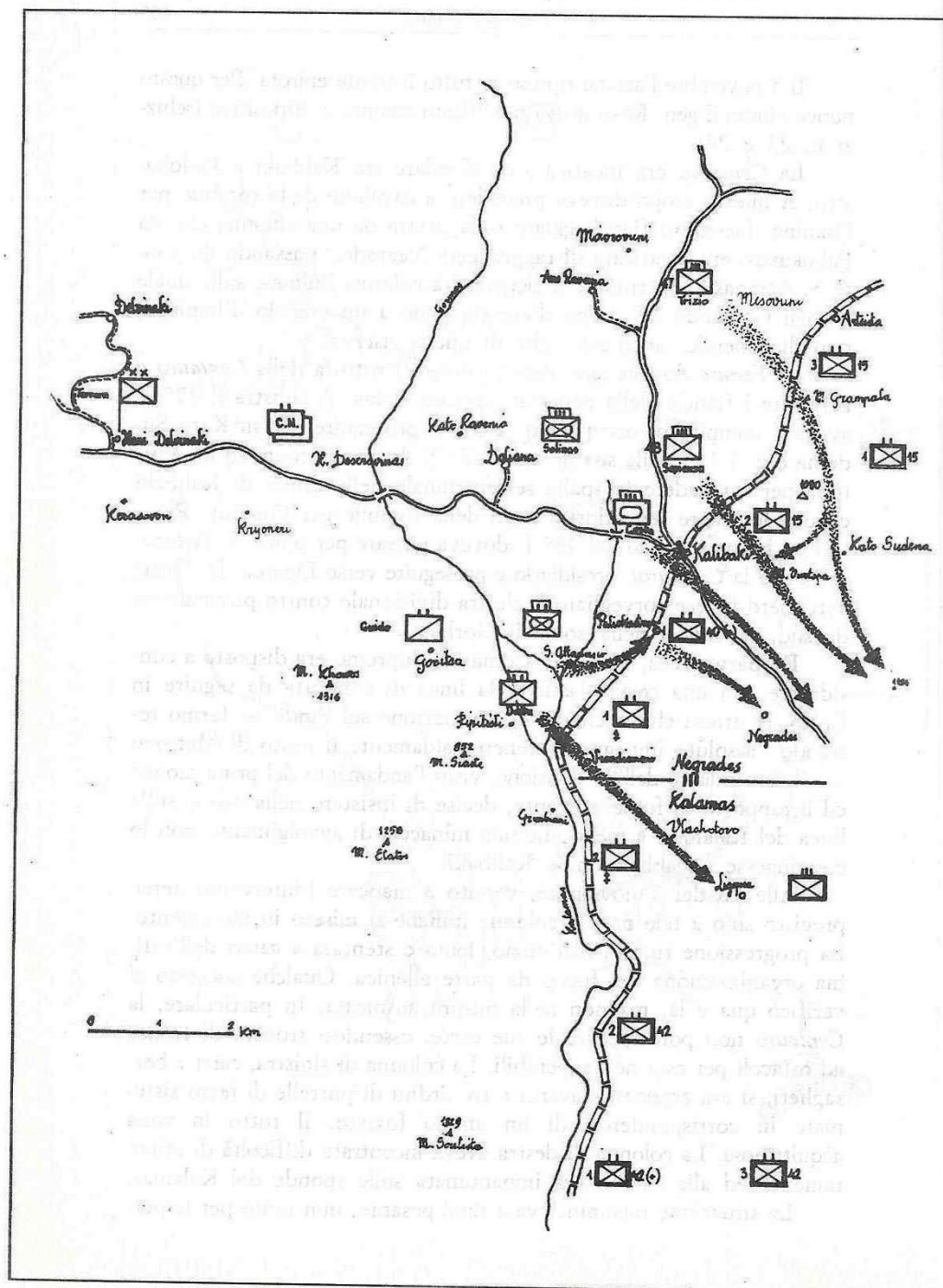
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 165

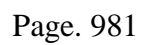
The design of attack of 5 November at Kalibaki

Schizzo n. 23

IL DISEGNO D'ATTACCO A KALIBAKI (5 NOVEMBRE)



L'OFFENSIVA SUL BASSO KALAMAS (5-9 NOVEMBRE)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

in personnel, all tolled not heavy, as much as for those relative to means. From 28 October to 5 November, in fact, the *Ferrara* and the *Centauro* and related supports of the Army Corps had altogether 645 losses, of which 147 dead, wounded 458 and missing 40 on 22,000 effectives. But the *Centauro* signaled that the XXII/5th bers. had lost nearly 30% of the personnel and 50% of the motorcycles; the 31st Tank had a battalion reduced to 40% of the tanks and another to 70% approximately; and the losses of the motor vehicles were going around on 25-30%. Naturally one be a matter of indicative figures since were in course operations recovery of means mired in the mud and hit, also however they were sensitive and such to induce to consider the motorcyclists Bn. not more employable for tasks needed in offensives and the entire division of some day of pause in order to reorder itself. But after an exchange of views with Visconti Prasca, reached towards the 20th Hani Delvinaki, Rossi, having recognized a sure weakening of the opposing reaction, especially on the right, ordered for the next day the resumption of the attack.

For the two divisions the morning of 6 November it was another disappointment. The bombing aircraft, whose work had been insistently demanded, took part in the combat, but not in mass or at the fixed hour, but much later and in successive resumed diluted in the weather. The infantries will proceed in the action always strongly contrasted, especially from the fire of the enemy automatic arms, so that also the new efforts said results were modest. However, towards the coming of the evening other hopes: the reaction of the Greek artillery had been manifested during the much less intense day that in the previous day, the fire of the machine-guns was faded; the positions reached towards dark from the columns had improved the situation. All this induced Rossi to a last attempt to insist then for the occupation of hill 1,090 and, making hinge on said position, to proceed with other troops to the encircling of the road junction of Kalibaki in order to continue towards Gianina. Other columns had to stretch to the occupation of the positions of hill 790 (east of Gianina), already struck by the air force.

At the first lights of the 7th resumptions the attack. To the 11th fire of the Greek artillery, than since from the beginning had resumed to hardly contrast the movement of the columns, emphasized the violence of its participation, especially with actions of counter-battery and interdiction. To the 13th the uselessness appeared clear to continue in a sterile effort. The *Ferrara* had occupied the hill 1,201 and the north slopes

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of hill 1,090 but it was stuck under the slopes of Vurtopa, the *Centauro* was arrested on the Kalamas at the S. Attanasio bridge.

Gen. Katsimitros was receiving reinforces, even though few organic, and others were in route. This lot, united to the successful defensive would have induced him to consider the situation good if he had not feared of being turned by the Pindo, to whose care ignored development of the events, and from the Thesprotia area. The evening of the 5th in fact had telephoned to the High Command, synthesizing the situation and expressing doubts and perplexity. Also it could have said - and the truth would have said - that the feared Italian armored division, with its light trucks and its motorcycles, was war instrument of the insufficient and in a generalized manner most insufficient value on that land. The High command reassured it on the withdraw taken from the combats on the Pindo and it specified that task of the division was that one to conserve the positions of Elea (Kalibaki)-Kalamas. For the Thesprotia area could "*in necessity case to put into effect to your judgment a elastic defended retreat at the maximum until to the swamps of Acheronte, on condition that the withdraw does not compromise the remaining divisional alignment. We have taken urgent measures for your direct or indirect reinforcement*"⁽⁶⁾. The Greek design was based on the forecast not to be in conditions for holding to long, once pass the mid and Lower Kalamas. Not being able to count on the timely affluence in that place of reinforcements, it came then studied a bending of all the left of the device, supporting the new line to the slopes of Mt. Sulio and to the course of the Acheronte.

In effects, more to south the *Siena* had success. After repeated attempts, for the third time had throw a footbridge (15:00 hours of 5 November) with boats, more not interrupted from the enemy fire. Quickly the two battalions of the 32nd infantry crossed the river and, swept up the Greek resistances, at 18:30 they got hold of the heights of Varfani. During the night a secure bridgehead was formed. The successive day a bridge was carried a to completion also, having succeeded in such a way to establish a regular connection with the other side. The evening of the 6th Riziani was occupied, but in the night the order arrived to suspend the advance and to deploy on the positions reached.

Also not making part of the *Ciamuria* Army Corps, in the

6) Greek S.M.E. op. cit., vol. II, page 87.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Epirus area it acted, to the extreme right, also the Litorale grouping. Reached the Kalamas, as it has been said, the same evening of 28 October, had been found of headway difficulties analogous to those of the *Siena*. At 10:00 of 5 November even it began the forcing, making use of a man bridge thrown at dawn and a footbridge. The Greek resistance was not tenacious as on the Upper Kalamas, indeed quickly declined. At noon, the bridgehead was realized and to evening the objectives of the day were achieved. The grouping was the only combination of forces that faced an operating situation similar to that one assumed in the offensive plan, and put to profit the circumstances without delay: the three columns began to come down towards respective guiding south along of movement, exceeding easily the resistances of the four battalions approximately of the Thesprotia area. On the other hand, after the forcing of the Kalamas, inasmuch as by now the units were withdrawn in disorder, that it did not appear possible to arrest them and considered that without a clean countermeasure the situation threatened to assume proportions much more critical, Katsimitros ordered the previewed regression of the entire Thesprotia area. The preparation of the new line was somewhat laborious, having to reorder the units and to insert new forces. Informed although of the imminent arrival of the mechanized regiment of cavalry and by now the sure possibility of participation in the fight, where they had been need, of the 3rd division, Katsimitros was hesitant, so that the High command requested to put for enrolled if it were thought in a position to assuring the maintenance of the position of Elea-Kalamas⁽⁷⁾. It guaranteed the engagement and in the days 7-9 November completed the new alignment of the left wing: the area of Elefteriochorion and, the new Thesprotia area, along the left of the river Acheronte. But by now the Italian offensive was getting exhausted. End from the morning of the 7th the Comando Superiore Albania had ordered General Rivolta to arrest the 3rd grenadiers at Plataria and to only push a sturdy exploration ahead. The *Aosta* and *Milano* regiments, respective arrived at Murtos and Margarition, having to therefore to retreat.

7 Greek S.M.E., op. cit., vol. II, page 100.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

2. THE "JULIA" ON THE PINDO.

Before examining the operations carried out by the mountain division *Julia* on the Pindo from 28 October to 10 November, it is necessary a premise of the character of the climate. Two are the elements of enunciate: The ridge of the Grammos, on which runs the Greek-Albanian border, and the chain of the Pindo. Before it constitutes a sturdy bastion that protects or threatens the flank of who moves towards the east and the possession of the buttress of Mt. Arena is condition essential in order to guarantee freedom movement on the mid Sarandaporos.

The chain of the Pindo is constituted from a long ridge that extends from the group of the Grammos to the pass of Metsovo.

On all the chain the movements are easier in cross-sectional sense than in that longitudinal; for reached who it proceeds along the ridge is always subject to attacks coming from the east. The more important points of the insufficient system of the communications are the road net of Furka-Samarina and Metsovo. The possession of the first one is indispensable for any movement towards the east, both in the high and in the mid Sarandaporos valley. The possession of the second demands remarkable forces in order to put the defense in a position to protect from attacks coming from the northeast and east.

In order to conclude, given to the collection area and the objective assigned to the *Julia*, the movement had necessarily to be carried out with direction northwest-southeast, those ones, that is, less favorable like course of the communications. On the conditions of these last ones insufficient news was had. It turned out that it could be only counted on paths, long, winding, with remarkable unevenness to exceed of continuous, with numerous obligates passages and not always suitable to the transit of baggage train without work. One became therefore necessary to take advantage of more routes in order to facilitate the movement and to diminish the depth of the columns. On the other hand it was necessary that every column had sufficient force and logistic autonomy for being able to gain the expectable resistances alone and, at the same time, in order to concur to the action of those lateral ones. This was possible along all the - distance except in the zone of the Smolika: elevated (2,636 m.), full of rocks, steep, block, lacking in communications that cross it. The presence of this solid mass had to obligate the several columns to increase itself, and that in correspondence of the two delicate points in which more the cooperation of all the units could be necessary: the passage of the Aoo and the overcoming of the Furka-Samarina cross roads. In fact, under the enemy pressure, the

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

units of the Julia maneuvered also on the Smolika, but arresting the advance.

The movement direction selected to impose guaranteed continuously of the external flank, easy attachable, as it has been seen, from the Vistritsa valley. Therefore at first the possession of the crest of the Mavripetra and the buttress of the Arena was necessary to make sure itself; possession to maintain until all the division at least had not passed the Sarandaporos. In according to time it had to trim strongly the ridge of the Pindo, being blocked subsequently several the accesses, until the units were not paraded. One became therefore necessary that the external column was sturdiest and that moving along the ridge, but without skirting to the east, even if communications thereby were introduced as better. The Mavripetra, obstacle initially, but it placed problems: given the land, it was not possible to cross it quickly, therefore it was necessary to increase the operating area with the fast occupation of basin of Gramosi, dominating the few accesses to the same ridge. Finally, to the pass of Metsovo it was necessary to introduce with all the re-united forces, in a position to arranging itself to defense against two or also three origins, therefore on Metsovo the routes all had to converge.

On the Pindo already it has been said of the line of conduct adopted by the Greek High command. On 28 October found in place the detachment with the same name, directly commanded by the SAMO. was composed of two battalions of the 51st Infantry (the third was in course of arrival), one frontier company and one cavalry squadron; but supported by numerous other existing units pertaining to the 5th brigade (the I and II/2nd infantry, the I and II/52nd infantry) and to 1st division (I/4th and II/5th and units of the 57th of infantry), in order to limit us as much as able immediately to flow on the Pindo, and in fact will take part all in the space of three days, and without to extend look to the contiguous field of the 9th division. The front entrusted to the detachment (from the Smolika to the excluded Aliakmon river) corresponded nearly exactly to that which the *Julia* had to burst into.

The security device comprised eight places of border, constituted of squads with 15-20 men or two automatic arms. The battalion of Konitsa held the positions of Kleftis and the narrows of Stratsani. To find that such alignment corresponded to the situation supplied from the intelligence of the *Julia*, with exception made for the zone of Gramosi, where a battalion was estimated rather than one reinforced company. The detachment had to prevent the Italian penetration

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

tending to separate the forces of the Epirus from those of the western Macedonia. The position of resistance on which it was previewed of being able to carry out an effective static defense followed to about the alignment Mt. Skala- Mt. Stavros – Oxia - Kastaniani; with of positions highly summarized but arranged for the intrinsic natural force (sketch n. 25).

The *Julia* articulated in two groupings of forces the 8th alpine (Col. Dapino) with three columns: the *Tolmezzo* bn., initially in protection of the external flank and then rearguard; the *Gemona* bn. with the *Conegliano* gr. (less one battery); the *Cividale* bn. with one bty. of the *Conegliano*. The Commander of the regiment moved with the *Gemona*, that one of division followed the *Cividale*. Objective of attack: Zygos di Metsovo to occupy to defense front to the east. The intermediate objectives: the areas of Furka and Vovusa.

The 9th alpine (Col. Tavoni) was in two columns: the *Aquila* bn. with one bty. of the *Udine* group and the *Vicenza* bn. also with one bty.

The Commander of the regiment moved with the *Aquila* bn.. Objective of attack: the positions of Plaka (hill 1.593) - Peristeri (hill 2,294), to occupy to defense front to the west. Intermediate objective: the zone to the west of Elatochori.

On the right flank of the division acted the V bn. Albanian volunteers reinforced with some squads of alpine, with the task to occupy the basin of Konitsa and then to assure the flanks until to Metsovo. For how much it has been pointed out – the impossibility of supplying from the rear, previewed duration of the operational cycle of 4-5 days, availability of baggage train limited to that one of the units and at most to 60-65 % of the TOE - had been necessary to adopt drastic measures in logistic field, which: to leave behind, to the base of Erseke, all the cartage, all the equipment of the soldiers not indispensable, the kitchen, the canteen, the officers and non-commissioned officers baggage; to reserve the baggage train exclusively to the transport of provisions, ammunitions, sanitary material and of the transmissions; to use the little draft animals hired in the area for the transport of ammunitions and materials of the engineers. To notice that these predispositions then made to feel their influence for all the duration of the campaign, because, given the events following, nearly all the material deposited at Erseke was lost. At dawn of 28 October the border was crossed "(the impulse, sweeping up the frontier places and capturing automatic arms, ammunitions and various material. The columns opened the road until Sarandaporos exceeding the defense, considerable above all on the two wings and by nightfall the *Gemona* and the *Cividale*

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The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

had occupied the Stavros. At the first lights of the 29th the advance resumed under a torrential rain that transformed the paths into rivers of mud, it provoked the full sudden flooding of the Sarandaporos and its tributaries, and hindered also radio communications. There soon began cases of chill, but the main obstacle was the Sarandaporos, that was exceeded at a ford only with a thousand difficulties. All the enemy resistances from the Greek units instead were regularly smashed with vigor. On the 31st the 8th alpine securely held the road of Furka with the *Gemona* to the south-east, the *Cividale* to south and the *Tolmezzo*, who had been rejoined after initial to have found obstacles due to the impervious land, with the northeast; while the 9th alpine were found to the northern slopes of the Smolika. Therefore the roadway of Furka was assured, but the bitterness of the march, the cold already especially intense at night, the continuous driven rain, had slowed down considerably the movement regarding the forecasts. It urged therefore to accelerate the advance on Metsovo, also in order to exceed the crisis of supplies that is beginning to be felt.

The progression of the *Julia* had not been calculated by the Greeks in the measure in which it took place. Above all the fast occupation of Stavros had put at once in crisis the defensive organization. The feeling of a inevitable breakthrough was slowly diffused. The signals made by units on the Pindo were worrisome. The afternoon of the 30th, the commander of the detachment sent an officer to state *de visu* the situation in the central sub-sector. These he telephoned the evening: "*the situation is deprived of hope. I have scraped together some thirty men in indescribable conditions. The arms, the ammunitions, the food lack. It is not possible to send them in forward because of their low moral and their great fatigue (...). Send bread*"⁽⁸⁾. The threat of the separation of the forces of the Pindo from those of the western Macedonia became imminent, but the High command raced to the shelters with promptness: on one side the nearer units ordered to start on the Pindo all (and they were several), from the other it thought useful to specify the commander of the 8th division that its main task was that one to prevent the invasion of the Tessaglia along the director Gianina - Metsovo- Trikkalia, and in second request he only had to preoccupy to prevent the invasion towards the Ætoloacarnania region, since on the low course of the Arachtos and in the zone of Agrinion-Arta they were already available units of the 3rd division.

8 Greek S.M.E., op. cit., Vol. II, page 130.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"Therefore - Papagos wrote - the task of the forces of the Epirus, that could not be reinforced quickly because was still found in phase of mobilization, consisted in opposing a elastic defended until the situation in the Pindo was clarified. We wanted to avoid that these troops were excessive worn away in the attempt to arrest the enemy on front line of Elea- Kalamas river defense, and that the realization of the other tasks to them became problematic assigned. In that moment to yield borders of national territory did not have much importance how much would have had some instead the isolation of the forces of the Epirus from their ways of communication towards Tessaglia, and opening of the doors of Greece to invader "(9).

On 30 October Gen. Papagos determined to modify the alignment, removing the field of the Pindo from the command of the SAMO in order to entrust it to the II the army corps (Gen. Papadopoulos), organism in a position to leading the fight locally and to supply it independently. Even if from Greek part the moment was judged *very critical*, on the evening of the 30th the general picture already had been modified for effect of the arrival of the new troops. On one side there were five mountain battalions, isolated from their base. From the other the 1st Division (Gen. Vrahnos), who had just assumed the responsibility of the area with the task to consolidate the arrest of the Italian penetration from Soufliakas in the north, to Vrisochori (east south of Konitsa) to the south; to reduce the bag progressively and to eliminate it finally with actions delivered to judgment of the II Corps, in connection with the forces available.

The bag was already practically contained: to the north the II/2nd and the II/52nd infantry were deployed; to the east the I/52nds, I/2nd and 9th gr. squadrons, with the II and III/51st, I/4th and units of the 57th infantry; to the south the I/51st infantry and the forces of the contiguous Aoo sub-sector (II/5th reinforced). And they were in arrival the II/7th and the III/52nd. In short against the 8th alpine (three battalions) there were nine battalions and a squadron, besides the smaller units! Against the 9th alpine (two battalions) for the moment was a reinforced battalion (sketch n. 26). The choice of the Eptachorion as the headquarters of the Commander of division and the continuous to flow of reinforcements "*carried to stars the moral of all*"(10). In effects all told that the situation was in a position to be upset. The advancing direction of Italian was clear towards Vovusa, what that offered all the left flank to counterattacks, let alone suggested to resume the buttress of Mt. Arena to the ends of the previewed counter-offensive. While the II Corps was given the cavalry brigade that was concentrating itself in the zone

(9) A. PAPAGOS, *La Grecia in guerra*, page 43.

(10) Greek S.M.E., op. cit., vol. II, page 139.

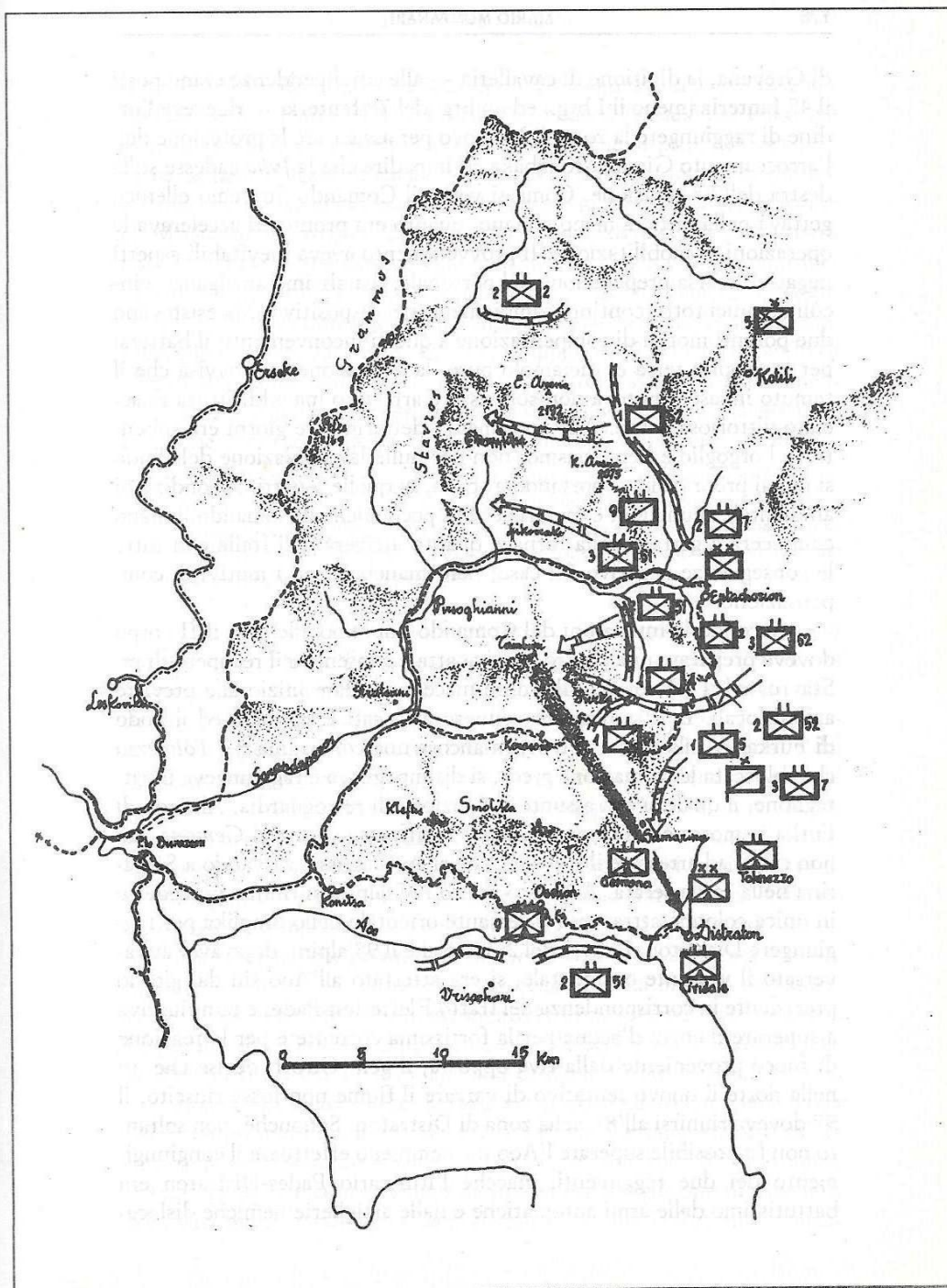
The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

The operations on the Pindo from the 10 to 3 November

Schizzo n. 26

LE OPERAZIONI SUL PINDO DAL 1° AL 3 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of Grevena, the division of cavalry - to whose command was placed the 4th infantry (less the I bn.) and a bn. of the 7th infantry - the order received to reach the zone of Metsovo in order to assure the protection of the Gianina - Kalabaka line of communications and to prevent that *Julia* falling on the right of the 8th Division. As is shown, the Greek High command threw into the fight, by one by one, as much as was ready and accelerated the mobilization operations. The provision had inevitable negative aspects: insufficient preparation of the personnel, most insufficient amalgam, organic routes ties, continues changes in the deployment. But two powerful reasons of compensation to these disadvantages existed: fighting for their own land and, us also say it, the unexpected perception that the feared invasion could be victoriously not only arrested but quite pushed back. To the discouragement of the first three days it was replaced the pride and the enthusiasm: for none of the population of the Pindo joined to the own soldiers not carrying itself to the rear, in those very harsh environmental conditions, ammunitions and material. Also among the few Italian Commands it will begin to throw into the furnace as soon as they arrive from Italy with all the negative consequences of the case; but the reasons will lack compensation.

According to the intentions of the Greek High command, the II Corps had to prepare a counter-offensive apt to allow the recovery of Mt. Stavros and the III Corps, on the Macedonian front, to give beginning to the previewed local actions. On 10 November Likorrachi was attacked and the road junction of Furka. At Likorrachi a company of the *Tolmezzo* was still found that, blocked the Greek formation, disengaging and reaching the battalion, which it had assumed the rearguard function. At the road junction of Furka the Greek movement not only broke up against the *Gemonia*, but it did not succeed to arrest the *Cividale*, than the pass arriving at Samarina in the late evening was opened. To this point the 8th alpine gathered and proceeded in single column through the eastern slope of the Smolika in order to reach Distraton. The evening of the 2nd, inasmuch as the 9th alpine, after to have crossed the western slope, it had stopped at Aoo since from the previous day in correspondence of the Elefterion - Pades feature and it did not succeed to cross the water course for the strong current and fire reaction coming from the across the river, Gen. Girotti determined that, if in the night the new attempt to cross the river was not successful, the 9th had to join the 8th in the zone of Distraton. Then, was not only not possible to exceed the Aoo but not to carry out the joining of the two regiments, since the Pades - Distraton route was most battered from the automatic arms and the enemy artilleries located

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

on the left of the river. The evening of the 3rd the 9th alpine was found collected between Paleoselio and Pades and the 8th at Distraton, less the *Cividale* that nearly had arrived at Vovusa. In part the encirclement that was outlined for the 8th from part of the cavalry brigade, by now the *Julia* was in action for a week and with it had carried only five days of provisions and forages. By means of requisition in *on site* it could supply for the meat, but there was none thing else and worse those that is lacked the fodder for the exhausted draft animals. The supply to asked by means of aircraft for some days had insistently not been up to now possible and the picture appeared truly worrisome, especially for the 8th, in how much the 9th were trying to feed themselves from Konitsa. Holding account of the promise of an air supply for the successive day, a pause was arranged. The situation came therefore reassumed from Girotti the to Comando Superiore Albania:

"Enemy is to the rear, on the sides & ahead *stop* in order to proceed in whichever direction supply is necessary *stop* would appreciate to know in regards to understandings & possibility that send command *stop* Konitsa column for supply for how much turns out that enemy comes down Sarandaporos *stop* enemy aircraft flies over & daily acts on our units *stop*".

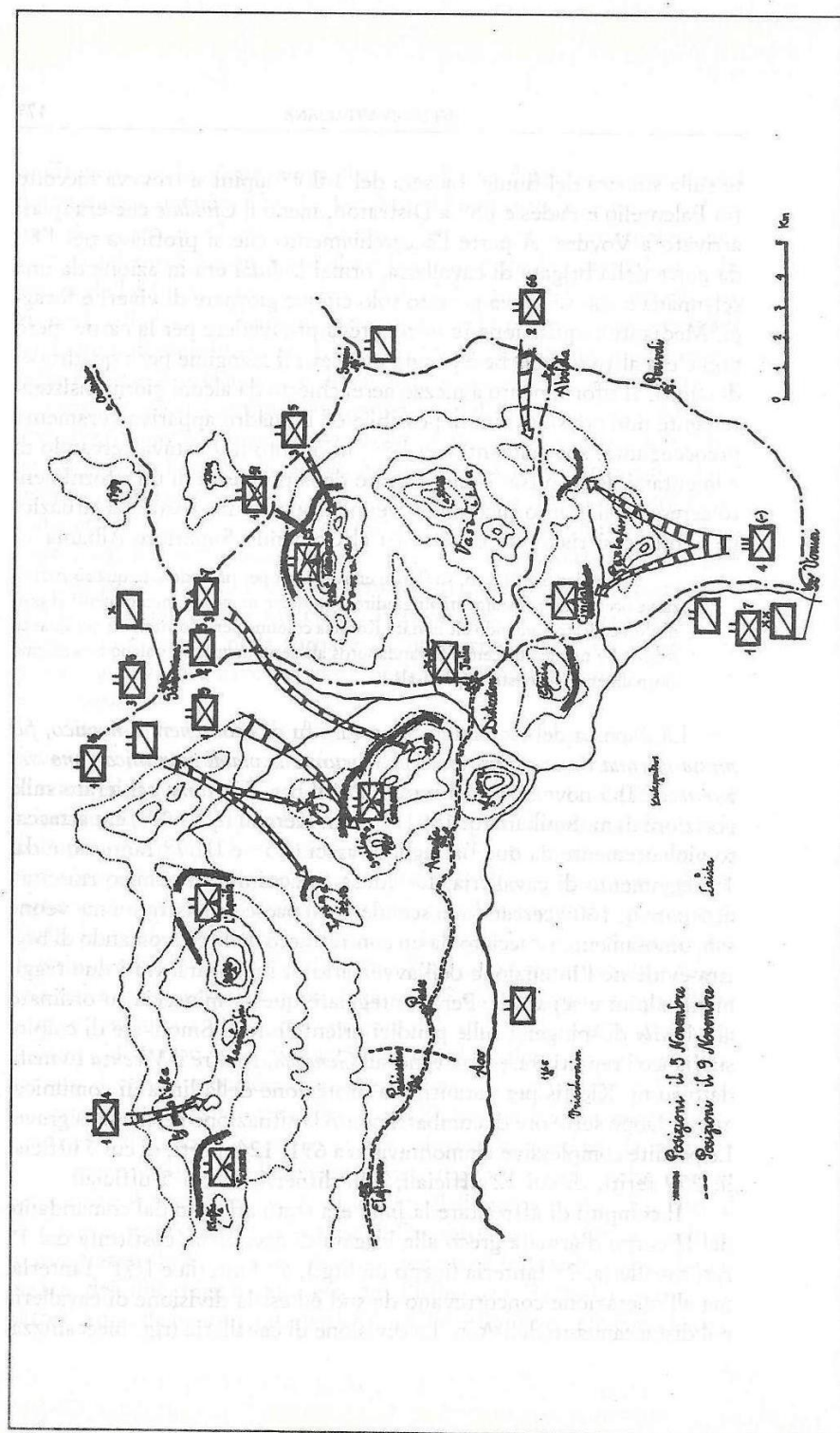
The answer of the Comando Superiore was "*to contain the enemy, to mass in the Bryaza zone (Distraton) & to assure the way of communication with Konitsa*". On 5 November (sketch n. 27) the *Gemona* Bn., the deploy on the positions of Mt. Smiliani (hill 1991) and of Mt. Kergoli (hill 1609), was attacked violently by two Greek battalions (I/5th and III/7th infantry) and from the 1st cavalry regiment. The defense was heated; the enemy succeeded to occupy hill 1609 trying to come down on the country of Distraton but the intention of the enemy of wedged themselves between the two alpine regiments was bloody driven out by a counterattack of the cp. the commander of the Bn. Was obvious and separating them. In order to face this threat it was order to the *Aquila* to push itself on the eastern slopes of the Smolika and to hit on the flank the units that pressed on the *Gemona*. Moreover the *Vicenza* was sent on Mt. Kleftis in order to guarantee the protection of the communication line. After seven hours of combat the situation remained serious. The total losses amounted to 691: 126 dead, of which 5 officers; 259 wounded, of which 12 officers; 306 missing, of which 5 officers.

The task to face the *Julia* was entrusted by the commander of the II Greek Army Corps to the brigade of cavalry, constituted by the 1st cavalry Rgt., the 7th infantry (less a Bn.), 5th infantry and I/51st infantry, but the operation south and east concurred from the division of cavalry and the detachment of the Aoo. The division of cavalry (rgt. Mechanized,

The operations on the 4 to 9 November

Schizzo n. 27

LE OPERAZIONI SUL PINDO DAL 4 AL 9 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

3rd cavalry and 4th infantry), concentrated at Metsovo, had headed how much more quickly possible towards Vovusa where, on 5 November, made contact with the *Civiale* and were at once rejected with losses. Joined also by the I/7th infantry, it insisted in the pressure against the mountain battalion, that in the meantime had received order to withdraw on Distraton. The detachment of the Aoo, instead, was formed by the battalion of frontier of Konitsa - to welding between the 8th Division and the detachment of the Pindo - and by the II/5th reinforced, reached Vrisochori on 1 November from Metsovo. A few days later the detachment was absorbed into the forces of the 1st Cavalry Division.

By now the troops collections were sufficiently large in order to crush the *Julia*. It understood it and tightened the teeth, knowing that worse was in order to come. On 6 November, on the Gomara the *Tolmezzo* laboriously held headway to the repeated attacks of the I/51st and III/5th. The *Civiale*, stopped on the southern slopes of Mt. Valisitsa, rejected the efforts of the I/7th and the II/4th; but in the meantime another two battalions approached: the II/66th and the II/4th. The *Gemonia*, still held tight to the height of Mt. Smiliani and Mt. Kersoli, after resistance deprived of hope, exhausted, had to yield to the I/5th, III/7th and to the 1st cavalry regiment. Fortunately the presence of the *Aquila* Bn., than had shown oneself on the east slope of the Smolika, withheld the Greeks who afraid of a lateral counterattack. It was the tenth day of uninterrupted combat. Given the situation, it was decided that in the night the 8th disengage and reach the zone of Pades - Elefterion. The *Tolmezzo*, after the most violent counter assault that it put on in escaping the units that encircled it, could free itself and be moved on the heights to northwest of Distraton, throwing back the Greek garrison that had been arranged for the defense. The *Civiale* instead did not succeed to lighten the pressure and the *Aquila* was struck on the Smolika in order to prevent to the collapse of all the positions. The others two battalions were stopped on the Smiliani - Kiura alignment: it was necessary wait the night. And in the following night the *Civiale*, encircled and attacked continuously, succeeded to open the road and to rejoin with the bulk of the regiment. The withdraw still continued for three days, slowly, under rain and snow, the continuous fire of the adversary, rejecting one attack after the other, fighting for longest hours of continuation. The battalions were exhausted, the losses sensitive between the men and draft animals. The afternoon of the 7th Girotti received the telegram with which Visconti Prasca ratified the end of the offensive through the Pindo:

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"Your support mission is at an end gather about the Konitsa base put a barrier colon Vojussa mount Grapenizza ridge Messaria period for obstruction Sarandaporos have already was sent a battalion of the 139th infantry & a motorcyclists company period today if you say so will be made to flow another battalion period Leskoviku - Erseke zone you are concentrating part infantry Division Bari period action *Julia* division behavior add new glorious alpine history & your behavior is magnificent period bravo end point".⁽¹¹⁾

While the *Julia* was struck between the *Smolika* and *Distraton*, the Greek II Corps reordered and assumed once more the organic appearance. The 1st Inf. Div., in the first formation, extended from Mt. *Suflikas* to Mt. *Vuzion*, nearly in a straight line. Before it was devoid of operations. At first in truth of he was not sure and he preferred to be useful from the stasis in order to arrange himself temporary to the defense. Asked by the Commander of the Army Corps and reassured from the exploring elements of the absence of Italian troops, the division, preceded on all the front by cavalry units, began to move on the morning of 6 November. Some reason for caution could have reason of being, in as much as, news received of the unit arrival of the *Bari* division at *Konitsa*, it feared that from the Italian side a new offensive was wanted to be tried with it to exceed the western slope of the *Smolika* and to aim at *Kerasovo*, the pass of *Smolika* being occupied and giving support, with the left, to the *Julia*. This ended in order to provoke second thoughts: the advance was stopped and all the attention and the concern were polarized on the measures in order to block the origins from the *Smolika*. Very soon it was clearly that problems from that side did not exist; consequently the 1st Division, while it supplied with some units to strengthen the cavalry brigade extending the front some on the *Smolika* until Mt. *Kleftis*, with the 5th brigade of infantry, heading by its orders, occupied the *Stavros* and *Oxia*. However the II Corps still estimated not to have sufficient forces for a decided change of line of conduct in relation is to the fluidity of the situation in the valley of *Aoo*, because of the presence of *Bari* in the area. Such that on the evening of 8 November imposed the stop.

In the day of 10 November the 8th alpine, striking itself still bitterly and bravely, it succeeded to escape to the vice and to collect themselves at *Konitsa* under the protection of the 9th alpine. On the evening the commander of the area was assumed from the divisions *Bari* and the *Julia* began

11) DSCSTA tele 025721 dated 6.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

the transfer towards Premeti in order to reorder itself. The first operational cycle of the division was closed therefore, after fourteen days of bad and uninterrupted combat that had carried it to a stop at Metsovo (sketch n. 28).

3. THE OPERATIONS IN THE AREA OF THE XXVI ARMY CORPS.

At the beginning of hostilities on the front of Korça was characterized from a rather lively activity of the smaller units of frontier more advanced. The feature of greater intrinsic weakness was that one of Bilishti.

The operating direction of Kastoria/Florina - Korça, that passes for the threshold of Kapestica and is served by a good roadway, adduces immediately to the basin of Bilishti. Between this and large plain of Korça rises the harsh mass of the Morova, meridian slashed with high summits to 1800 meters. The communications between two plains are possible only going around the mass. The northern passage is marked from furrows of the Devoli, between the Morova and the Ivanit, whose importance appears obvious, constituting it the hinge of the two doors of Todorices (origin from Pixos) and of Zemblaku (origin from Bilishti). To south the Bozhigradi - Korça passage, much more difficult, is opened through the southern layers of the mountain group keeping itself on the 1000 meters of altitude. In short: the defense of Bilishti must use the frontier positions and must however be thought simply usable for a defense to determined time. The defense of Korça, instead, is based on the possession of Mt. Ivanit - Morova, solid natural line (sketch n. 29).

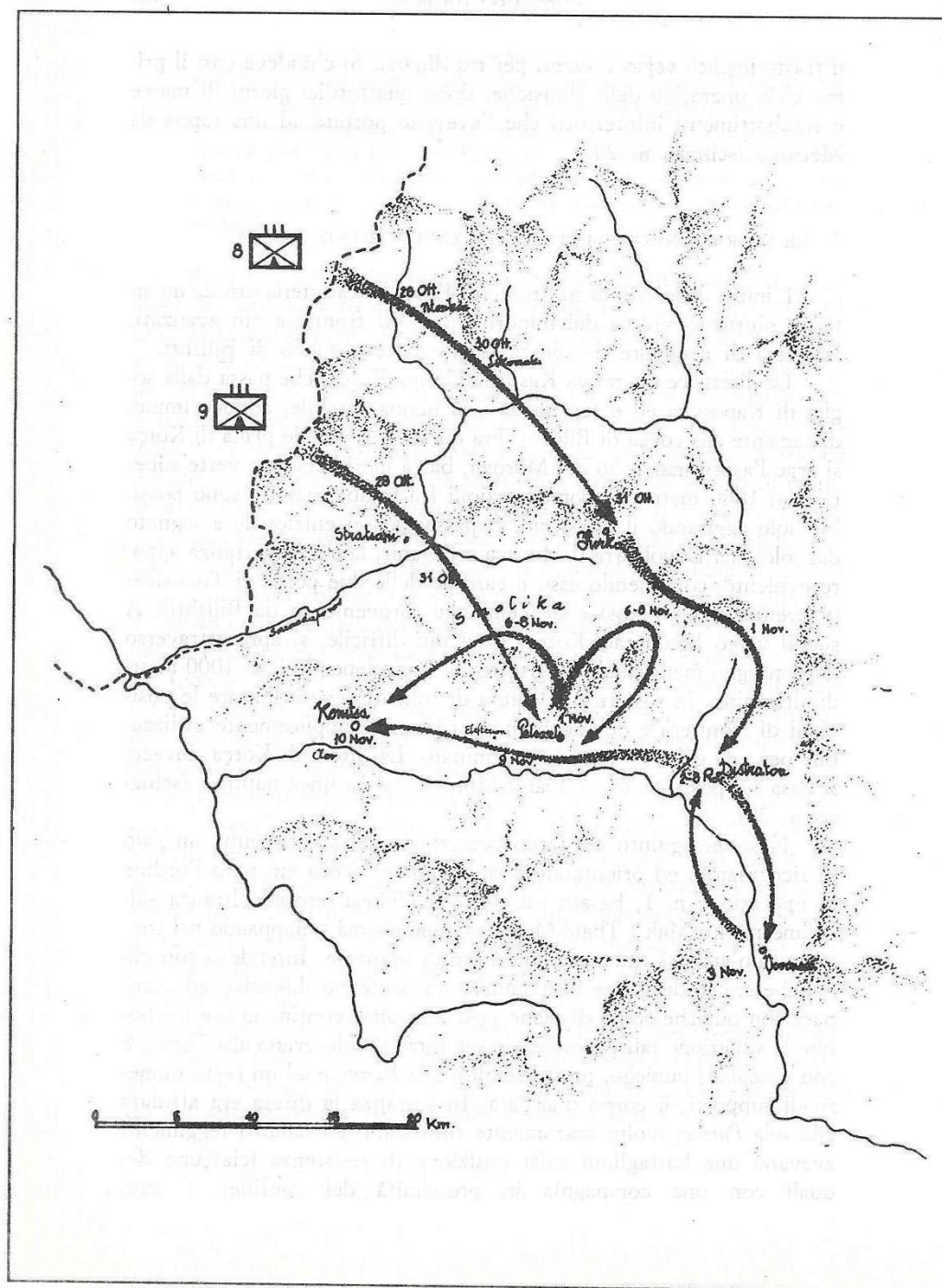
Nasci was reached in the late afternoon of the 23rd. Executed a pair of recognitions and orienting themselves quickly, had emanated the operations order n. 1, based on the concept at the same time to resist to the bitter end on the alignment Mali i Thate – Morova - Grammos but developing a dynamics activity with the advance units. It meant with that to mask the decision to assume a defensive behavior and to occupy with some surprise attack positions beyond border apt to improve local the tactical situation. Its forces were reduced to the *Piemonte* with an employment tie, soon melted; to the *Parma* and a sure number of support from the army corps. In substance the defense was entrusted to only the *Parma*, a very insufficiently reinforced: both the regiments had two battalions on the resistance position (each of which with one company in proximity of the border); the third

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The operations of the *Julia* alp. Div. from 28 October to 10 November

Schizzo n. 28

LE OPERAZIONI DELLA D. ALP. «JULIA» DAL 28 OTTOBRE
AL 10 NOVEMBRE

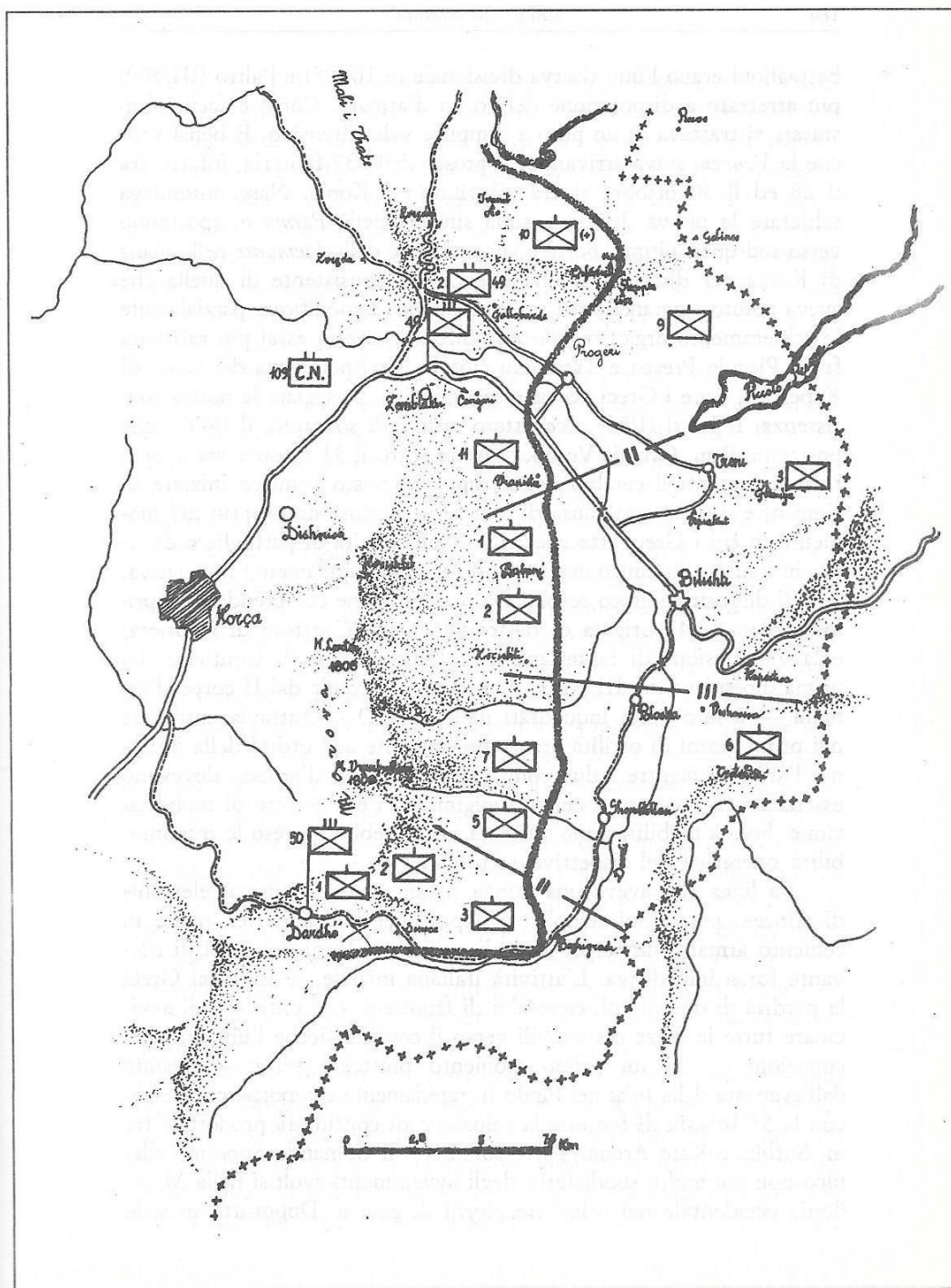


The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

The front of Bilishti on 28 October

Schizzo n. 29

IL FRONTE DI BILISHTI IL 28 OTTOBRE



The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

battalions were a divisional reserve (the II/49th) and the other (III/50^o) more rear disposition of the army corps. As it is easy to state it was a matter of a pure and simple defensive veil. And on the contrary true the *Venice* was arriving. The bulk of the 83rd infantry, in fact, between the 28 and 30 October already had gathered at Korça. Nasci meant to deploy the new division on the left of the *Parma* and, moving towards the south this last one, to at least carry part of the *Piemonte* in the plain of Korça in order to decide more of a reserve consisting than that one that had been able to scrape together. A defense a lot more advanced holding between the Piccolo Prespa and Trsteniku began therefore to modify partially the alignment organizing that is in correspondence of the Jarco di Kapestica, where the Greeks had begun to test our consistency. The III and the II/83rd will receive order to replace the I/49th on the positions of Mt. Gremja – Verniku - Strene before 31 October but the inherent operations the change of the troops in place was begun in delay, and this will be cause of a serious confusion just in the moment in which the Greeks will attack. In the activity of patrols and attacks to contain the enemy who in fact had assumed the initiative quickly.

The Greek dispositions according to the planning comprised in the first lines the 4th Brigade of infantry (with IX sector of frontier) and the 9th Division of infantry (with the IX^{bis} sector of frontier). First it depended on the III Army Corps, the second by the II Army Corps – at the time included in the SAMO - however both in the first days with hostility were directly to the orders of the Section of army, while the two commanders of army corps had essentially to care for the quick development of the mobilization measures. The mobilization only completed would they have taken the responsibility operating of the respective sectors.

The IBa line had a good defensive system; elements of trench, simple and double emplacements for machine-guns, reinforced concrete works, numerous anti tank obstacles some of which of important obstructive force. The Italian activity begins, if it caused to the Greeks the loss of two small frontier strong holds, allowing them to approach with all the forces available towards the border and so the only worry - at first rather more serious - aroused from the advance of the *Julia* into the Pindo was quickly composed, closing with the 5th infantry brigade the solution of continuity produced between Mt. Suflika and Kato Arena. All adding, the Greek High Command was not much satisfying of the events carried out in the western Macedonian in the first three days of war. After all in the headquarters

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of planning sure aggressiveness had been previewed towards Korçano. As well as more it was displeased in how much came to lack a successful diversion, in sure way which, to avoid that the Italians could concentrate all their thoughts on the Epirus. Consequently, it ordered to the SAMO to promote offensive actions on the bulk of Morova - Mt. Ivanit, understandings to occupy the road junction of Korça, that would have raised the moral of the army and all the nation. To such goal on 10 November was assigned the 11th Division, even if with a tie of employment, and initially approached the frontier the 17th Division, destined to the Bulgarian front.

The problems of two major unit in the first formation, 4th Brigade and 9th Division, were but different. This last one above all had found in serious embarrassment because of the events in the Pindo. The first provision was therefore that one to strongly guarantee the left flank of the Macedonia area with the 5th Brigade (2nd and 52nd infantry), that was flowing into the zone, and to connect it with the right of the 1st Division that was organizing the frontal control of the progression of the *Julia*. The consequent measures were realized without difficulty thanks to the substantial calm reigning in the field of Korça and to the direction of attack a continuation of the *Julia* towards Metsovo. On 31 October, in fact, could have place the joint between the 5th Brigade and the 1st Division in correspondence of spur of Mt. Arena and in the few days the Greeks could reorder and be pushed again towards the Grammos without to find any obstacle. But if in this period the 9th Division had had to limit themselves to close, for how much of its competence, the solution of continuity taken place in the Pindo, the 4th Brigade was not harassed from safety worries. It held the front on both of the small lake of Prespa and until the evening of 28 October had all the units online. Received the order of animate the defensive attitude, it had quite programmed advance to Bilishti, intention that appeared so much risked in relationship naturally to the first news on the Italian offensive to the SAMO from induce taking part energetically near the brigade, indicating a much more closer objective.

The attack, previewed at first for 31 October, was sent back of a day. It had to be delivered at the same time along three directions: to north from the peninsula of Pixos, between two lakes of Prespa, with objective the positions of Mt. Golines - Mt. Gogorit to a kilometer from the border (two battalions); to the center against Mt. Gremja - Verniku (33rd Inf.) and to south with objective the threshold of Kapestica (28th Inf.). He was dealing with

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

in short of the Italian advanced structure of safety for the protection of the basin of Bilishti.

The beginning of the action had been fixed for the 7th of November, but hitch and several misfortunes provoked delays of various types in the three area; however, after a preparation of artillery and combats strongly upset, the Greeks succeeded to reach some objectives in the late afternoon.

To north the events did not have much history. Instead to the center and south the Italian forces they were more consisting. Moreover the I and II/83rd Inf. of the *Venezia*, as soon as it arrived and not well oriented, they will yield the positions of the sector of Treni. The counterattacks of the II and of the III/83rd in its turn arrived in zone, they succeeded to improve but not to modify the situation a lot.

The evening of 5 November the supposition, base of the entire operations plan, than two divisions was enough in order to confer safety to the Macedonia area was demonstrated deceptive. The worry for the fate of the left flank of our alignment in Albania, will be from now on always increasing.

Until to the 4th were followed local actions. From the Italian side other units in the fight had been introduced, in the attempt to earn precious time for warlike dispositions to better the position than resistance thanks to the in flux of the entire *Venezia*. At the same time, also the Greeks reordered their alignment. The 4th Brigade, that it had received new reinforcements, On 4 November assumed the denomination of the 15th division and received the order of reiterating the attack on Bilishti.

At dawn of the 5th, after an intense and very planned fire preparation, the line Mt. Vipiakut - Bilishti was invested with violence. Completely dominated at a close distance from the height of Mt. Gremja and Mt. Lapishtit, the positions garrisoned by the 109th CC.NN. Bn. and the II/83rd infantry very soon were subordinated to the hardest test.

After some hour of fighting the first one was forced to withdraw but the II/83rd resisted vigorously. The commander of the regiment then tried to extend his left towards Mt. Vipiakut in order to try to stop the leak or, at least, protect the remained uncovered flank, but new a most violent attack begun a little after noon nailed it in place. The combat lasted until dark and although it's extreme hardness was resolved to favor of the defenders. However the losses endured and in consideration that the enemy would have resumed the attack the following day in still more favorable conditions induced Gen. Nasci to order, towards 20:00, the evacuation of all

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the positions. The withdraw, begun towards 21:00 and carried out in groups, proceeded with order and regularity from being able to be carried to conclusion during the nocturnal hours without being disturbed by the Greeks (sketch n. 30). During the combats of Bilishti two episodes of meaning took place. The Albanian *Tomori* Bn. of the 83rd infantry said painful test then if dissolving⁽¹²⁾, much to convince Nasci to represent the opportunity not to employ again, at least in the difficult situation of the moment, the Albanian units. The second was the alarm sent from the base of the *Julia* at Erseke, that a baggage train column was attacked from Greek elements: it was indicative of the serious delicacy that those close to the front, or in order better to say that those close to the border, without warning came to assume.

At 08:00 of 6 November Soddu arrived in Korça by airplane without warning, which, put to the current of the state of the things, he recommended to still resist for five or six days, requesting in that period of time strong reinforcements would arrive. Nasci, also without to dramatize, very clearly showed the greater found deficiencies: his Command was still constituted from only the four officers with which he had left Italy; the medium field artillery was represented from seven 149/35 guns and a group of 105/28; the defense of the sky of Korça, daily visited by Greek aircraft, impossible because in was still waiting on the predicted group of 76/40. At 11:00 Soddu, who was accompanied by Gen. Ranza, commander of air force of Albania, left again for Tirana after to have agreed on the convenience not to move from the resistance position, without to try to bring itself back to the east of Bilishti. The following day the first units of the *Arezzo* Division arrived. On the Macedonian front temporary stasis come down: the Italians tried to give to life to a sufficient defensive organization; the Greeks prepared the offensive on Korça.

From 28 October to 5 November the XXVI Army Corps had endured altogether 760 losses: 85 dead, of which 4 officers, the 365 wounded, of which 16 officers; 310 missing, nearly all of the Albanian *Tomori* Bn..

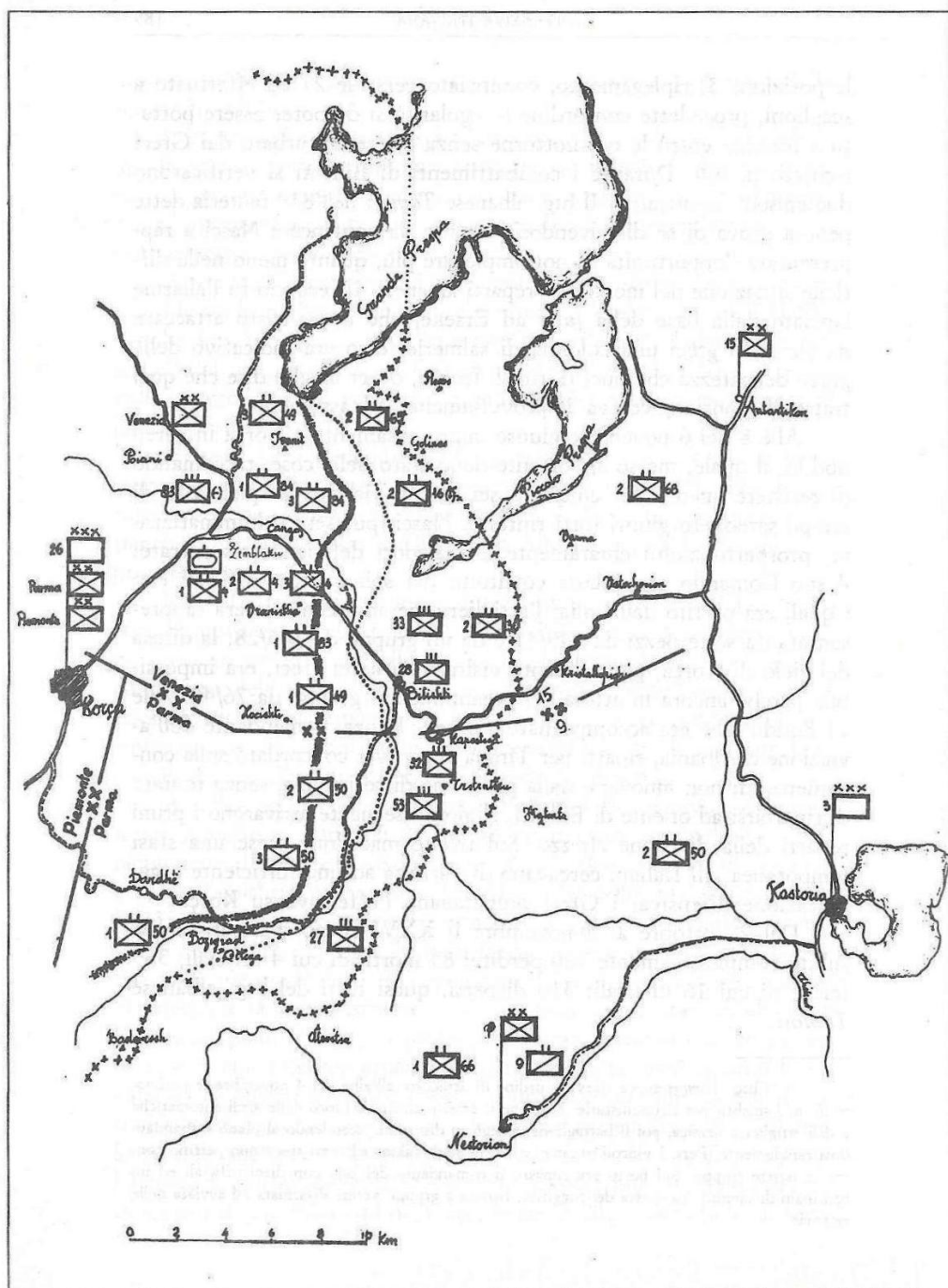
12) The *Tomori* Bn. had received order to attack at dawn of 4 November the positions of Mt Lapishtit in order to retake them. The action was arrested against the fire of the automatic arms and the enemy artillery; then the battalion withdrew in disorder, coming down to the plain and going off the rails quickly. Lost organic and disciplinary ties, some Albanians even fired against our troops. On the place remained the commander of the Bn. with ten officials and hundred men. The mass of the deserters, returning in groups, were disarmed and started for the rear.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The situation in the Korçano on 6 November

Schizzo n. 30

LA SITUAZIONE SUL KORCANO IL 6 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

4. THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE FAILURE OF THE OFFENSIVE.

The development of the operations had been carefully followed in Rome. With full confidence, consequent to absolutely unjustified optimism always manifested, from part of some. With a state of indefinable mind, legacy to the not full persuasion on the political guarantees that promised a express success, from part of others. On 30 October Mussolini departed in a train from Rome for Grottaglie, where he meant to implant "his own tactical Command". They were with him Soddu and Pricolo, both convened of the urgency at the last moment, without many explanations. The day after they were joined by Adm. Cavagnari called from Taranto. They remained in the capital Badoglio and Roatta, but the "army" part near the Supreme Commander evidently was cared for by Soddu. Today in fact, dated 30 October communiqué to Visconti Prasca:

"(...) I have ready new divisions: I will send your request for three for now. Therefore also two necessary Commander of Army corps for the articulation of the command. I have chosen the 3rd (Arisio) and moreover the 8th (Bench). A task that you will both appreciate (...)"

To Grottaglie was convene from Tirana also Gen. Ranza that had supplied good news on the beginning of the offensive, in part pessimism the conditions of the weather. Mussolini of took action with satisfaction and wrote at once to Visconti Prasca:

"Beloved Visconti

There is content of the operations in this first phase. General Ranza has given to voice other satisfactory impressions to me.

In order to strengthen your alignment, the "Bari", that was to Corfù occupy will disembark instead at Valona tomorrow 10 November.

Given the attitude of Belgrade you can move towards the south or the Coriza area the "Venezia".

While I have sent immediately Gen. Soddu to Rome in order to accelerate the shipment of the three divisions of which to the demand for 10 October and all trucks.

They are sure that you will continue to impress to the complex of the operations that fast rhythm that the events, more than the doctrine, impose peremptory.⁽¹³⁾

Soddu, in fact, had gone to Rome for the meeting called for 10 November near the Comando Supremo. Such meeting, presided

13) Letter s.n. autograph dated 31.10.1940. Cfr. S. VISCONTI PRASCA, op. cit., p. 108.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

from Badoglio and to which the Soddu undersecretary and the three heads of the G.S. of Armed Forces participated, he had to deal with the invasion to Corfù and of the shipment of reinforcements to Albania. Roatta began shortly illustrating on the map the situation on the Greek front and specified that, even if the Supreme Commander had not asked reinforcements - evidently to part those previewed for according to time of the operations -, his troops had to be very tired because of the inclemency of the meteorological conditions and would not have been badly to decide in *in loco* of other units in order to allow substitutions. The only immediate availability was reduced but to the division predestined for Corfù. With regard to the opinion to renounce to the invasion it was unanimous, held account that the value of occupying the island largely would be diminished the Epirus coasts; therefore, recognized that for the moment the more urgent and important problem was Greece, Badoglio determined to divert the *Bari* to Albania⁽¹⁴⁾. But Roatta delineated also the issue of the marine transports. The only increase of the steamboats, he said, did not concur to intensify in the intentional way shipments, because they were conditioned of the insufficient ability to unload in the Albanian ports, ability that could only increase after the acquisition of all the dominant zone of port Preveza, and positions the water table. Moreover the entire logistic problem had become heavy because until to 10 October the S.M.R.E. it had only supplied for an autonomy of five divisions then increased to eight. The unit shipment, therefore, had quickly halved such autonomy. By now to the increase of the troop a correspondent had to always accompany itself increment of supplies. Finally it was necessary not to forget that, in lack of railroads in Albanian territory, he had to increase the number of the motor vehicles for the transports of the Quartermaster. In short to the shipment of the other divisions, than bulk would have been completed towards 10 December, became necessary to add - inserting them in programming - 500 motor vehicles in order to decongest the ports, the logistic equivalent of every division disembarked and the 1,250 trucks demands by Visconti Prasca. Badoglio addressed then to Soddu:

"I request Soddu to report to the Duce the following: we had promised a consistent increase of trucks to the I.N.A. for the march on Marsa Matruh; I propose to the Duce that these shipments be suspended for now and are made to all flow to Albania.

In Albania moreover he will come at once disembarked the division *Bari*; for now we will not

14) DSCS f. 3524fop. dated 1.11.1940. It finds that Mussolini in his letter to Visconti Prasca he had already given as expected the shipment of *Bari* to Albania.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

take care of Corfù; we will dedicate instead how much in total we can subsidize the logistic services and send other troops in Albania.

The Duce who, given the intensity of these transports, the little capacity of the ports, the distance of the ports from the bases of the troops, the month that we had previewed for the transport of as much is necessary for the operations of the 2nd phase will be at least duplicate, in spite of all keeps in mind the good will. Therefore the three divisions that were previewed to be sent to the gulf of Arta for a second leap, will be overseas to the end of December.

To find that the shipment of such divisions was not asked for the occupation of the Epirus studied by the Visconti with the forces for which arranged, forces that I have already made to reinforce with a regiment and two groups removed to the Yugoslavian frontier and that now we will reinforce with another division, the *Bari*, that had not been demanded"⁽¹⁵⁾.

In part the persistence of the odd conviction that Preveza could resolve, in time, the serious problem of the transports via sea, when two weeks before Admiral Cavagnari came to decidedly discarded the idea of being able to use that port conveniently because of its deficient equipments and of its specific limitations, interests to emphasize the absolute not correspondence between a period of the letter of Mussolini for Visconti Prasca: "*While I have sent immediately to Rome Gen. Soddu in order to accelerate the shipment of the three divisions of which were demand for 16 October (...)*" and the text of the report of the meeting. We will return soon to the argument. The end of the meeting appears sadly prophetic:

"I wanted to insist on this - Roatta said -, that the disordered influx, made as a result of a phone call, of troops without their equipment does not represent an aid and brings disorder".

Badoglio addressed to Soddu: "*You said [to Mussolini] that I asked not to give the orders if not through me*".

Returning to Grottaglie, Soddu briefed Mussolini and yet on the issue of reinforcements for Albania had intentionally to be highly summarized. Pricolo being the person in charge to go to Visconti Prasca to deliver the letter of the Duce and, above all in order "to see" the situation. The 2nd Pricolo reached the Supreme Commander at Doliana and had with him a conversation of which he has brought back *particular minimums*⁽¹⁶⁾. Undoubtedly he received from the talk and the impressions of the trip very unpleasant feeling of *consternation*, to the point gives

15) From the report of the meeting dated 1.10.1940.

16) F. PRICOLO, *Ignavia contro eroismo*, Longanesi, Milan 1971, p. 14 and seg.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

to speak in the evening, just returning, to Soddu. These interrupted the speech, but the illusions were falling. Mussolini, yield on account that his presence to Grottaglie was totally useless, the evening of the 2nd returned to Rome. He began to be worried. Ciano, wrote to Tirana, you had collected concerned voices and he had hurried to inform:

"31 October - Still bad weather. I write a long letter to the Duce. Here it is lamented to us of the bad will of the- Joint Chief of Staff, that has not done much had in order to prepare the action. Badoglio was convinced that the Greek issue would have been resolved to at the table of the peace and acted with this prejudicial. That he has had as a result a preparation very much second rate of how much was lawful to expect"⁽¹⁷⁾.

Of this letter only indirectly reported what is known from Gen. Armellini:

"Ciano from Valona informs the Duce on the course of the operations and protests because the R. Army General Staff has lacked to the assumed engagements, to that is send in time the previewed divisions. Anger from the Duce (...) "⁽¹⁸⁾,

and particularly from Pricolo, present when the message of Ciano was delivered to Mussolini at the airport of Brindisi on the afternoon of the 2nd:

"Being seated beside the Duce I had been able to take a peek exactly: what was written to you that the operations proceeded well; that the "*Greek resistance was weak*"; but that in order to make soon and to respect the previewed times it would have been necessary to decide at once of the three new divisions, also in consideration of the delay imposed from the units in way of movement from the Yugoslavian front to that Albanian (Coritza). These news in was opened contrast with the assurances just given that day to me before from the Commander of the Troops of Albania. Or these, less than twenty-four hours than distance, had changed completely, to seem, or to Tirana another type of Commander in Chief existed who reasoned and acted in order own account (...). Was also obvious that began to delineate the purpose to throw on the General Staff the first responsibilities of eventual complications (...) "⁽¹⁹⁾.

Mussolini - always according to the report of Pricolo – *run over rough and ready*. Soddu, also present: "*We are habitual! The promises are not maintained! The three divisions still have not left and seem that they are not even ready*". It is worth the pain, to this point, to stop a moment in order to ask for which three divisions was spoken. In the meeting of 15 October, to the question of Mussolini on the number of thought additional divisions necessary in order *to occupy all the territory*

17) G. CIANO, op. cit., p. 318.

18) Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., p. 134.

19) F. PRICOLO, op. cit., p. 19-20

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

that leads to Athens, Visconti Prasca had answered: "At first three organized mountain divisions would be enough, naturally the circumstances will decide. Now these troops could be disembarked in the port of Arta in a single night "and a little before he had specified: "the shipment of other troops depends on what is the development of the plan and they cannot be sent to occupied Epirus".

On 17 October - and not 16 October as written by Mussolini - Visconti Prasca had asked in the first time for the *immediate shipment*, in the order, of four groups of mountain artillery, the motorized division *for the successive express development of the operations in Epirus in the Arta - Missolungi direction*, and of a division of infantry *in sight of a possible evolution in the compartment but yield some in relation to an eventual Bulgarian participation about Salonicco*. In the second place the contemporary preparation in Italy, available for a prompt shipment, of two mountain divisions and a second division of infantry, to disembark *at Valona and Porto Edda, just as soon as the successful occupation of Corfù, and in part more to the south, just as soon as occupied the announced islands (Zante and Cefalonia)*. Finally the preparation, always in Italy, of three regiments of cavalry with a tactical divisional Command, *to employ for the developments of the operations wider beam* ⁽²⁰⁾.

To this demand on 20 October Roatta had answered announcing: the transport *barring accidents within the end of the current month* of the four mountain groups and one Bn. M. 13 tanks; the arrival of the *Trieste*, *than given to the sparsely of steamboats actions to the transport of motor vehicles, could not be completed before 15 November*; the impossibility, at the moment, to make forecasts approximately the times of inflow of the division of infantry, mountain or alpine, you pick.

He then added:

"They are moreover prepared for Albania the following G.U.:

-1 or 2 divisions from mountain (according to what you will indicate for the division from above);

-1 or 2 mountain divisions (according to what you will indicate for the division from above);

-1 division Celere in formation (...).

Of these 4 divisions, You having communicated that some 3 are necessary for the action from the Epirus to Athens, 2 would come possibly disembarked in the gulf of Arta, or - otherwise - in next Albanian ports (...), the other two would be disembarked at Durazzo- Valona. You are asked, when you think it opportune, to communicate as desired were depart said 4 divisions"⁽²¹⁾.

20 DSCSTA, f. 024905 date 17.10.1940.

21 DSCSTA, cited f.. 4100 date 20.10.1940 of the S.M.R.E.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

In short, "the three divisions" of which Mussolini spoke had never been calculated⁽²²⁾ – nor demanded - for the occupation of the Epirus and not even for the front of Korça. It was dealt, a lot simply, of a confused memory approximately major unit to send to Arta *in one single night*. Such confusion could not exist if Soddu had reported with precision much discussed in the meeting of 1 November. Hit in the chest, Soddu - who also had assured Visconti Prasca to have ready nine divisions, and of being in a position to sending three of them at a time, requested - if of it he washed his hands, saying that the issue was of competence of the S.M.R.E.; therefore, according the testimony of Gen. Pricolo, continued: "*If I could have a command I could answer of the provisions to take. I ask to you, Duce, to go to assume the command of the Armed Forces in Albania*"⁽²³⁾. Mussolini did not seem, there and then, intending to collect the self nomination, and the morning of the 3rd delivered to Badoglio a memorandum in which to the practical action he recognized the situation and he tried to place repair:

"And by now obvious that the enemy resistance from the Greeks in Ciamuria is revealed advanced to the previewed one. To get the divisions off that mark the pass must take to the flank of the enemy alignment. This can be made creating a head of disembarkation at Prevesa and running for this operation the more serious and less profitable risks that were wanted to be run in order to occupy Corfù.

The operation must be immediate in order to be useful for puts into effect the period of calm in sea and sky (...)" ,

and he ordered at once to examine the problem.

The meeting of the chiefs of the general staff took place in the same afternoon. Badoglio, premised that also the *Venezia* and the *Arezzo* were being moved in the field of Korça, in which in short five divisions would have been found, (read the memorandum), placed on the carpet the issue of the disembarkation at Preveza. The question was resolved quickly under the profile of the entity of the force to employ: for Roatta the participation of a single Bersaglieres regiment - which was the idea of Mussolini - was of *dubious effectiveness*, for Badoglio the regiment was *thrown to the luck*, for Soddu *was lost*. They wanted at least three

22) In truth the S.M.R.E. had, of own initiative, suspended the dismissal order from the Ministry of the War, for *Bari* but also for the *Pinerolo* and the *rare* one in a manner so as to not only have them at once available for Albania. Availability, very meant, theoretical because the organic one was to the 70-75% of the war tables.

23) F. PRICOLO, op. cit. p. 20

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

regiments, but that involved a study under taken from part of the Navy, based on the possibility to use a beach to north of Preveza. After all: confirmation of the Albania destination for the 1st Bersaglieres, than was being embarked at Bari for Valona; concentration at Taranto of the two Bersaglieres regiments already prepared (2nd and 4th ⁽²⁴⁾) and of some campaign battery for the eventual destination Preveza; the study from part of the Navy of the transport and disembarkation of two regiments in the zone of Preveza.

From the statement how much the intention of Badoglio to execute if possible the order of Mussolini turns out obvious, and however not to negatively reply if not with incontrovertible data in hand, thinking perhaps not to have, otherwise, to be able to persuade him ⁽²⁵⁾. Roatta, instead, in closing the meeting openly manifested his own motivated dissent:

"I allow myself to say that we are not very favorable to this operation because we have already the worry of two fronts: the one the Epirus and the other the Coritzano. We think that soon after to have disembarked those two regiments we will have to disembark another. After disembarkation we will have that is other serious worries while these two regiments, without means of transport, I do not see what pressure can be exercise on the rear",

and added:

"... There is but one other serious worry: that he does not succeed that this swarm cut the lines of communication between Coritza and the Epirus front, that it passes to the border very close. For me this is the point more delicate than all the border ".

Badoglio, exiting from the meeting, was not at all calm on the course of the operations. He wanted us to see clearly and he wrote a personal message for Visconti Prasca:

"I telegraph you as your old superior. My norm is being securely anchored in a point during the battle. This is for You the field of Korça. You have divisions *Parma Piemonte* and in arrival there the *Venezia*. You will be able to employ also the *Arezzo* and *Bari*. With five divisions I think that you will be able to resist in place. I ask you to tell me exactly and frankly as you see situation. Give me in all urgency the frameworks" ⁽²⁶⁾.

24) The employment of the 4th Bersagliere had been previewed as reinforces for the occupation of Corfù, that one of the 2nd Bersaglieres for the eventual occupation of Cefalonia.

25) On 31 October Gen. Armellini wrote in his diary "(...) *Evidently Soddu has taken the ladle in hand. Days or so, speaking to me about the positions of Badoglio to the shipment in Greece, he said to me that the duce was black and that he could also get a divorce* (...) "(pag. 132).

26) DSCS tele 361/op. dated 4.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

He must admit that much best would have been if - having the strong doubts that the message betrayed - he was flown to Albania in order to become check personally, those that he was succeeding. The following morning (4 November) he wrote, the customary daily report to Palazzo Venezia and clearly exposed the outcomes of the meeting. Mussolini accepted at once the objections placed to the disembarkation in the Preveza zone and gave up, but asked to examine the problem newly of reinforce to Albania, studying an organic plan for the shipment of ten - twelve divisions, or also if more necessary, for being able to resume and to develop the maneuver that was escaping at hand. The issue had to be faced in the afternoon, but at the last moment Mussolini made to telephone to Badoglio to bring for him with Soddu and the heads of the G.S. of the three Armed Forces. The idea on which he was reflecting for a pair of days was matured: the troops in Albania had to be at once upgraded⁽²⁷⁾ yes to reach very soon to level of the army group; the new Comandante Superiore would have been Soddu; these while had to leave immediately for Tirana in order to examine the state of the things and to report to Mussolini personally⁽²⁸⁾.

In the meantime in Albania the sky became gloomy. Visconti Prasca had comprised the restlessness well that hid under the lines of the telegram from Badoglio and answered with appearing emergency but with conflicting affirmations and demands:

"Thank Your Excellency that always my superior is directed and master. My concept corresponds that one of Your Excellence: sure being on the defensive cover of Koriçano in order to maneuver Epirus offensively.

Delicate Koriçano situation especially first moment when considerable Greek forces thickened and defended could only count on division

27) Results begun at once the preparation of the *Modena*, whose shipment was previewed after that one of the motorized division *Trieste*, the mountain division *Tridentina* and the division of infantry *Taro*: let alone of the 1st alpine group they were destined, in origin, to transform into ternary the *Julia*. On the 5th Mussolini decided to air-transport because of the urgency the two Bersaglieres regiments 2nd and 4th. But they were sends via sea, except part of the 2nd.

28) At 18:00 of that same afternoon of 4 November Soddu called Geloso. Informed shortly on the events and asks if he appreciate the commander of the eastern army, that he would have had the task to operate from Korça towards Salonicco. Geloso found the twofold contradiction between the little shining beginning of the offensive in Epirus and the intention to attack in Macedonian, for joined with an army of new constitution that for the moment did not have sufficient forces not even for a sure defense. However he accepted. In the evening he had to leave for Brindisi and to continue, in airplane, for Tirana. Then - pair of hours later the departure was suspended and the following day Roatta communicated to him, without being able to supply explanations, than the command of the army of Korça had been entrusted to Gen. Vercellino.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Parma. With employment on the Koriçano front of the *Venezia* and *Piemonte* divisions, after march on foot respective of two and three weeks for lack motor vehicles, improved situation a lot and still improves begun with the disembarkation *Bari* division and employment near the *Arezzo* division.

The situation I think is not alarming and with the Italy forces influx more and more favorable war goals. Mobilization of the entire Greek army demanded ready influx of new forces from Italy and availability trucks, indispensable means both for defense and that for offense. Necessary more than ever in this first period the mass participation of aviation on only tactical supporters objectives for the troops. I repeat my confidence in the final outcome even if there are momentary difficulties for reasons essentially of transports and bad weather"⁽²⁹⁾.

The day after, while at Dervicani he followed the renewed attack of the "Ciamuria" army corps on the line with the Kalamas, it appeared to Soddu. The talk was short and friendly, then the visitor dismissed himself expressing the intention to go to Korça. To the headquarters of the Commander of the XXVI Corps the undersecretary to the War, to which they could not escape the alarming symptoms that already had hit Pricolo, had a long conversation with Nasci (6 November). It was as soon as finished to the withdraw of the units on the position of resistance of the Morova and the situation of the area, also not appearing a very shining - not as well as for the Greek pressure how much for the improvisation of the defense -, it was not outlined very dramatic. In foretelling to short expiration the reinforcements, and probably in order to validate the promise, Soddu revealed the imminent modification in the structure of the forces of Albania. Then he returned from Visconti Prasca and this time put the papers on the table: offer the command of one of the two army's, that one of the Epirus; he specified that he would have had the command between some day and added that he would have been settled down at Tirana, since the Brindisi - Durazzo cable was already in express preparation in order to render the telephone conversation between Tirana and Rome possible.

In that moment the XXVI Army Corps was being arranged on the resistance position: the *Parma* already was deployed; the *Venezia* in course of reorganization; the *Piemonte* in part constituted the reserve, in part covered the right of the C.A.; the *Arezzo* in arrival although exhausted from a long march⁽³⁰⁾. The *Julia*, to fifty kilometers inline by air from the border, was semi-surrounded and it was struck good,

29) Cfr. S. VISCONTI PRASCA, op. cit., p. 125.

30) The *Arezzo* employed much time in order to move itself into the area of Korça. It is true that the first two battalions reached - sent on trucks they encountered - in the late evening of 7 November, but on 19 November was not still all re-united.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

but to its flanks, on the Erseke - Leskoviku castling, existed a void. The *Ciamuria* Army Corps with the *Ferrara* and the *Centauro* was exhausted in its effort in order to break the defense of Kalibaki, while with the *Siena* bridgehead had constituted on the lower Kalamas to Varfani. The Litorale Group had reached Igoumenitsa.

It was urgent to recover the *Julia* and to guarantee the connection between the two army corps. Therefore, to confirmation of oral orders already given, the *Bari*, just now disembarked and initially destined to the Macedonia area, remained to the direct command of the Comando Superiore with the task to take part, on order, in one or the other field. In relation to that the bulk of the division had lined up in the Erseke-Leskoviku zone, being taken contact with the *Piemonte* and pushing elements of vigilance on the border, while a battalion at Stratsani had to arrest eventual coming from Greek forces from the head of the Sarandaporos and another battalion at Konitsa had to facilitate the withdraw of the *Julia*. For the *Bari* it was already begun, still before facing the enemy, the *via crucis*. Predisposed for Corfù, and that is ordered for a disembarkation of surprise in the island, it had seen its organic of division binary reduced to 500 men per battalion, had been deprived of nearly all the baggage train and the divisional services had been reduced to a minimum. In those conditions it had been diverted to Valona, disembarked between the 1 and 5 November without artillery, and started by single units to the front⁽³¹⁾. Already therefore it was tried that yielding to the necessary to support sending it urgency the 1st Bersaglieres, just arriving from Italy and assigned to the XXVI Corps, and withholding temporary at Konitsa the 9th Alpine let alone elements of the *Centauro*.

On 7 November Visconti Prasca was forced to admit that the offensive was ended. In truth not only the offensive had run aground, but with the left a threat was outlined of which still it was not possible to appreciate the dimensions and, that are more serious, to back not was troops with which the Commander could make to feel in the battle his operating will. Two telegrams to the ministry of the War give in a few lines the exact feeling of the failure of the ambitious operating design:

31) The remainder of the *Bari* departed for Valona following according to calendar: 10 November: 1,100 men; 11 November: 754 men and 630 draft animals; 16 November: 200 draft animals; 23 November: 985 draft animals

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

"Our attack can be thought arrested by enemy resistance *stop* useless to hope to reach objective until when will not be joined from other divisions ..."⁽³²⁾

"*Julia* lacks news on enemy pressure the movement of concentration in the zone of Konitsa continues *stop* on Staritsani towards Konitsa *stop* attack of army corps Rossi has not had results *stop* *Siena* division and Litorale grouping arranges bridgehead from left bank of Kalamas Varfani river, hill 657, Gomenica *stop* tomorrow troops continues to organize positions"⁽³³⁾.

At Rome a message of Soddu for Mussolini had also arrived, in which under an optimism patina very rhetorical emerged references to the unpreparedness of the enterprise, the under valuation of the adversary and the organizational superficialities:

"Excellency Visconti Prasca welcome Duce for confidence & for assignment conferral *stop* Our new encounter and predispositions organization received with imprinted joy & old fraternal friendship & association of doctrines and faith *stop* First impression: Italian army holding and then fixing nine Greek divisions over front of approximately 100 kilometers with a single reinforced division and attacking at the same time towards the Epirus while it was in action this threat on the flank has written a truly unknown page in the military history, giving test of a daring and of a decision that has astonished the enemy army and that it gives us safety to reach all objectives that You have indicated *stop*

Greece you gave for sure conquest of Koritza in 24 hours (news according to prisoners & communicated) *stop* I reserve details *stop* While precise situation 15:00 hours today *stop* Korciano Area *stop* By now you can think yourselves insured; to hold account that that has been obtained making to on foot complete to the *Piemonte* and *Venezia* divisions approximately 300 km & in truly infernal atmospheric conditions *stop* Detail: Commands under penniless stretch, radio stations eradicated for truly impressive wind blasts, horses drown in the mud *stop* Between seven eight days with arrival in the positions *Bari* and *Arezzo* divisions whichever Greek ambition will be able to be considered vain *stop*

In the meantime is necessary to continue mass aerial bombing *stop* On the Epirus front attack continues imperturbable *stop* draft to have itself due to march in a hurry with the infantries with only personal armament leaving artilleries behind because of bad weather and interruption destroyed roads and bridges *stop* Detail: coat of water from two to seven meters *stop* Positions in the zone south of the basin of Kalibaki is a true entrenched field with many orders fortifications and artilleries in caves; the north part has been conquered proceeds south *stop* Many works already has fallen *stop* Is necessary to keep in mind that they are always the *Ferrara* & *Centauro* that attack *stop* reserve other communications tomorrow *stop* While confirm in full necessity already shown

32 DSCSTA, 324 tele dated 7.11.1940.

33 DSCSTA, 327 tele dated 7.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Excellency Visconti Prasca to send by airplane Bersaglieres regiments true units of relief *stop* the more immediate necessity are the motor vehicles example: aviation is in crisis because it cannot transport bombs and benzene to airports"⁽³⁴⁾

Also Ciano was get in touch, but in his daily annotations came much assuming an attitude more detach that not in the previous weeks the conflict. On the 7th took to Palazzo Venezia undersecretary Benini, which he made a long relation in answer to the point, all told, favorable. At Korça, Soddu - Benini reported - thought that "*with the arrival of some alpine units every risk definitively is averted*"⁽³⁵⁾, in the Epirus area, Visconti Prasca thought about still being able "*to put himself in conditions for provoking the fall of Gianina*" while Soddu consider convenient "*to arrest the maneuver, to increase the forces and to attack in according to weather*". In the rears then all it went well: the civil organization was optimal, the port of Durazzo worked in full capacity and it was not blocked, the roads assured "*an intense and sure traffic between the rears and the front*"⁽³⁶⁾.

But the following day wrote that the news of Jacomoni did not coincide at all with those of the S M.R.E., much more pessimist. "*The Duce - he continued - at the time has along talk with Badoglio and Roatta and a plan for the shipment of the forces. It seems that Badoglio is a lot somber and of this the Duce is irritated. Above all because he asks still four months. Too many (...)*"⁽³⁷⁾, Mussolini in fact had convened Mar. Badoglio and Roatta but, not having any excuse, had masked his own irritation. The per diem history of the Comando Supremo dated 8 November reported the following "*Notes of the General Head of S.M.*":

34) DSCSTA, tele s.n. dated 6.11. 1940 of Gen. Soddu. Gen. Armellini in his diary (page 140-141) has a vent:

"*But Soddu forgets to say that one of those responsible is him. He forgets the day in which he was outside of the grace of God because Badoglio - that it considered in the position of a sandwich - made a last attempt, going from the Duce with the three Chiefs of general staff, in order demonstrating that the operation against Greece could not be made. He forgets to have criticized sourly Roatta when he made the compute of the forces, supporting that a Greek with an Italian could not itself numerically be compared because this is worth does not know how many of those (...)*" .

35) Mussolini, then, ordered immediately that a alpine Bn. the day after directly to Korça was air-transported. The Bn. it was the *Morbegno* of the *Tridentina* - that it was being concentrated by railroad at Brindisi - and was disembarked at Tirana (without mules) between the 8 and 10 nov., being the track impracticable of flight of Korça.

36) G. CIANO, op. cit., page 476.

37) Ibid.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"(...) On the 11th the Duce meet with Excellency Roatta to undertake an examination the situation taking the decision not to insist in the offensive, being limited to arrest the Greek advance to us and while to accelerate the shipment of reinforcements. Roatta represents that, come to this decision, it is necessary to send ten divisions and to organize all the logistic preparation; the resumption of the offensive will not be able therefore to be taken place before four months. In the meantime great aerial action will be necessary to carry out in order to wear away the adversary.

The Duce then speaks me about the responsibilities and of his understanding to recall Visconti Prasca, as soon as the Greek offense it will be arrested and reestablish situation. He represent like, not less of the Visconti Prasca, who is responsible as the deputy of G.S. and King, Jacomoni ".

Consequently, the S.M.R.E. dispatched the order to suspend the offensive and to arrange themselves on the positions reached, supplying to render the zone of Konitsa safe. At the same time from Tirana Soddu, than to rigor he did not have any title in order to take part, ordered Visconti Prasca:

"Reference yours 025790 and 0255798 today you adhere to the following directives: Epirus area you strengthen yourselves on positions reached and facilitated *Julia* concentration on Konitsa area to hold securely. You strengthen yourselves on positions puts into effect them. Center sector confirms the reinforcements with the second Bersaglieres. Accelerated influx of division *Bari* zone Perati. You supply emanation consequent orders. I will take command the 9th zero hours current"⁽³⁸⁾.

Pulled the reins, Visconti Prasca transmitted to Soddu a summary memorandum of the events until 20:00 of 8 November: in the Korçano the situation could be considered *remarkably improved*; the *Ciamuria* army corps was organizing in a waiting position *that it had to constitute line of departure for further offensive when the sufficient forces are had*, while on the lower Kalamas the *Siena* that had absorbed the Litorale grouping - consolidated in the zone of Igoumenitsa, pushing a pair of regiments of cavalry in recognition until to Paramithia; finally the connection between the Macedonian front and the Epirus, by means of Bari reinforced, could be *considered consolidated*. Not one word on the forecasts about the intentions of the enemy⁽³⁹⁾.

On the 9th Soddu was named Comandante Superiore of the Armed Forces of Albania, also keeping the assignment of undersecretary to the War, and he at once announced the new ordering to assume,

38) DSCSTA, tele 25/op dated 8.11.1940.

39) DSCSTA, f 025860/op. dated 9.11.1940,

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

in relation to previewed in flux from Italy of the other Commands and major unit: the 2nd Army⁽⁴⁰⁾ with Visconti Prasca, right; the 9th Army with Vercellino⁽⁴¹⁾, on the left; the Supreme Quartermaster Albania with the Gen. Marfuggi.

And probably thanks to the distribution of this order that had not followed as written from Badoglio with the per diem history of the Comando Supremo in 11 date November: *"In the connection with the Duce it was decided that Gen. Visconti Prasca takes to the commando of a C.A. and Gen. Geloso that one of the Army of Epirus⁽⁴²⁾".*

In Rome the events matured. Mussolini had felt the need to make the point that the Albanian situation and in this understanding he convened for 10 November the main military exponents.

This the report of Badoglio:

"(...) In the 11th meeting from the Duce of the Heads of the G.S. of the F.A., present Colonel Sorice, Head of Cabinet of War, that he replaces the Gen. Soddu in his absence. The Duce takes to the word and the chronicle of the actions in Greece, representing as the forecasts of Jacomoni and Visconti Prasca on the insurrection of the Ciamuria completely are failed. Being itself verified by the opposite, today the engaged forces appear insufficient to the action. He thinks therefore necessary to send to another 7 ternary divisions, to take those located in Albania to 9 Bn. and to hold ready to leave in Puglia another three divisions on reserve. He means to be ready for 5 December.

I ask the word in order to say: 14 October, you have convened me and General Roatta and you have asked how many divisions were necessary for us in order to occupy Greece: we have answered twenty, that it wanted to say to send of another ten to Albania and to create a adequate logistic equipment. The day after have meet again, present his Excellencies Ciano, Jacomoni and Visconti Prasca, and, without more consult you have given order to attack on the 26th, become then the 28th. The facts are those that you have exposed, but of these facts it cannot

40) The indicative of 2nd Armed was modified, after a pair of days in to the 11th army.

41) Gen. Vercellino, commander of the army of the Po (6th), had been convened by telephone to Rome the evening of 4 November. Arriving with the understanding he had been endured accompanied from Badoglio at palazzo Venezia, where Mussolini had ordered him to go to Albania to take the commando of the Army of the Macedonia area. The army would have assumed the denomination of 6th Army, since it would have been that Command who gives Verona would have carried himself in groups to Albania. Soon after, but it was decided that the indicative would have been of 9th Army.

42) The annotation is continuation from the reference of a dispatch (f. 3573) directed to the Cabinet of the Minister of the War and to the S.M.R.E. *"for Geloso, Visconti, Prasca and Messe"*) not recovered to the actions because it was lost with many other documents. But it is probable that decision taken the day (10 November) and then cancelled for the part Visconti Prasca on participation of Soddu refers to the first one. These, in fact, at 20:45 of the 10th telegraphed to the interested one: "72/op

Personal for Excellency Visconti Prasca. Continuation advanced instructions I confirm are entrusted Your Excellency as the commander designated of Vintage year. Authorization to carry relative to you distinguished degree. He gives congratulations". In compensation, twenty-four hours later the radio gave the news of the substitution of Visconti Prasca with Geloso.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

be rendered of the G.S. General responsible, of the S.M.R. Army. In how much to attack 5 December, less than how much is not want to repeat what happened, not believed possible.

It is necessary to make an exact account of the time being necessary in order to have arrive reinforcements and to complete the preparation and, only on the basis of the outcomes, to take the decisions that will appear necessary.

The Duce has agreed giving assignment to make to me to study for the G.S. of the R. Army and the R. Navy the plan of transports"⁽⁴³⁾.

Mussolini, that had begun the meeting trying with a sure confidence to pour every I debit on Jacomoni and Visconti Prasca, was instead felt to accuse, hardly hidden, of being the first responsible of the events. Not only, but that his bizarre decisions - the date of 5 December in order to resume the offensive - could have only the result of a retort of the setback. The accused the blow, but he did not react. For the moment.

According to the report of the meeting⁽⁴⁴⁾, he had begin *stating* that the things had not gone as were from attending and as they had made to *hope* the political leader for Albania and the commander of the troops:

"(...) The plan of Visconti Prasca was based on two elements: one of military character (a sure number of divisions), the other of political character (one turned that it would have had a revolt to rear of the Greek troops). (...) All that is not happened, indeed it is happened the exactly contrary (...). Lacking these elements political character, has been seen at once that the forces of which were given to Visconti Prasca were not sufficient (...)".

Intentionally it flew over on the fact that the first and more premised important than political nature was the participation of Bulgaria, of which in sure way it had made oneself guaranteed. Soon after he contradicted himself on the insufficiency of the forces asserting that:

"(...) this plan would be successful if instead of having of the columns employed in advance that I call lenticular, if we had been of the more compact masses".

But perhaps he meant to allude to a much greater total entity. Then he read to a Note "containing for the G.S." General his directives, stopping himself on the salient steps for some word of comment:

43) DSCS, dated 10.11.1940.

44) Minutes appendix 5.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

- constitution of a army group formed from the 9th and. 11th armies, under the command of Soddu;
 - the 9th Army was pre-sent to the sector of Korça and that one of the Pindo. On the first one it had to line up the *Piemonte* Inf. Div., *Arezzo*, *Parma*, *Venezia* and to hold in reserve one mountain division. The second one had to hold the *Julia* and *Bari*. Total: seven divisions, that is 63 battalions, amounting to nine the Bs. for each division;
 - the 11th Army had the three divisions starting (*Ferrara*, *Siena* and *Centauro*) and the Litorale grouping, to which had to be added another six divisions. Total: 10 divisions, calculating as such also the Litorale Reg.;
 - in reserve, in Italy, another three divisions. Altogether therefore: 17 divisions in Albania and 3 in Italy;
 - operating tasks for the 9th Army, defensive for all the winter; for the 11th Army, resumption of the offensive not before 5 December;
 - the two air squadrons had to continue to *bomb Greece and protect Albania*.
- Therefore, in order to prevent objections, he illustrated as, on the base of the relative data to the shipment to A.O., to end by 5 December did not have to appear too much close. However, he added,

"(...) If the divisions still had to be mobilized could be thought insufficient this time; but a prospect that I has been sent from the Ministry of the War in date 3 October 1940 tells me that there are ready - at 70-80% of war staff -13 divisions of infantry. If these news is exact that I have been supplied, I have in Italy prepared a good 13 divisions of infantry, of which I ask only 6, plus three in reserve ".

This reasoning has of the narcotic. It would have been induced to think it clear and simple bad faith, on the other hand could not ignore that during the month of October it was begun dismissing - still in course – a good six hundred thousand men, however must recognize that to speak about bad faith in this case it is lacking in logic: Mussolini would have tricked if same and it could not have any desire to endure new military disappointment after to have intentional and obtained to lead in first person the operating troops. He could have forgotten the issue about the dismissing: it had a too much good memory and then the provision was most recent.

The only explanation resides in the typical amateurishness of who dishonestly

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

too much good memory and then the provision was most recent. The only explanation resides in the typical amateurishness of whom inexperienced commander: He did not have an exact idea of that what truly means a mobilization or a demobilization.

It is strange but still more - it cannot be denied - that none of those present has been useful for the cue in order to clear the things unequivocally and, above all, in order to ask it repeal of the adopted measure of the month before. Gen. Roatta touched, is true, the subject: *"In order to make headway to the total program, and to maintain the other divisions with a decent force, we have calculated to recall 100 thousand men approximately. He will not convene to recall people that we have already sent to house from some days"*, but with the hardness necessary not to dispel whichever misunderstanding. After all Mussolini, sight his approximately, could also have understood that it was simply dealing to recover 20-30% of lacking personnel to the marked divisions already prepared first of October! Perhaps Roatta wanted to avoid to transform the meeting, the whose climate had to be stiff, in an open indictment against the Head of the Fascismo, Supreme Commander of the operating Armed Forces, la susceptibility of which could not be remained indifferent of headway to the final speech of Badoglio reported from the report:

"To reread all the per diem: 14 October you have joined us here - me and Roatta - and have placed the problem of how many troops were necessary in order to attack Greece. Roatta (...) declared that twenty divisions were necessary. It was a matter therefore of the shipment of another ten divisions (...). 15 October (...) You took the decision to attack 26 October, date that - as it is known - was then moved to 28 October. We have tried to make in the better way all that that could be made in that period of time. I have made this exposure in order to demonstrate that as well as the Joint Chief of Staff how much the General Staff of the R.A. is not enters in this organization that has been carried out in clearly contrary way to all the our system, than based on the principle to prepare itself before then to attempt well (...). When task to the Greek transaction I feel myself to go up flames to the face. We in two days can make this study and will be in a position to tell - ended the transport - in order which day we will be ready (...). When we will have made this tiny study and I specify (...) You can give the order to us to attack ".

The meeting finished with the indication, from part of Roatta, some meaningful figures with respect to the large problem of the transports, after that Mussolini left the meeting, remaining to await of the conclusions of the studies.

At 17:00 of the successive day Gen. Geloso was urgency convened

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

at Palazzo Venezia. There he approached accompanied by Col. Sorice who had practically replaced Soddu as undersecretary. Mussolini received him with these words: *"I entrust You with command of the 11th Army in Epirus, which has offensive task: objective Prevesa and the channel of Corinth. Decisive offensive! He goes some on the honor of the Army!"* Geloso did not have an exact idea on what was happening in Albania, but, to good account, answered that he would have obeyed, adding that in order to act quickly it was necessary to have all predisposing. To that his interlocutor replied: *"He is well. I will give all means to you: 400 heavy field guns, heavy and medium tanks, Stukas will be concentrated in your army. You will have to form a assault column that must pass at all costs. The army of the north, the 9th, will hold for now on the defensive"* (45).

5. THE FIRST PERIOD OF THE CAMPAIGN.

On the arrival of the new commander *in pectore*, Visconti Prasca hurried to modernize him on the situation, both orally and with a summary memo of the events until to 20:00 of 8 November.

Soddu of taken at look and then transmitted *"for its retrospective value"* to the S.M.R.E., accompanying it with a short comment:

"The document confirmation the disproportion between goals and means, characteristic of the action. In particular:

1) Action of the mountain division *Julia*. The tasks entrusted to the division were excessive. The obstacle constituted by the rivers in flood had, given to the season and the atmosphere, being object of forecasts and providence.

The consistency of the division in only 5 battalions had to be very present estate, therefore also the resistance and the reactive ability to the adversary, of which the S.I.M. it had communicated the fortified systemizing. The enemy goes in fact considered in its passive resistance but which able element to counterattack and not only to offend in his turn.

The order of withdraw given to the *Julia* was of difficult execution. Such difficulties went estimated. It is necessary, in fact, in the given orders, to inspire itself verify "tactical honesty".

The employment of the *Bari* Inf. Div. was "to little by little" and in a disorganized way, also admitting that it was taxed by the situation.

The complex of the objective provisions, then, was immediate only on the map; but in truth it was slow much, as was easy expectable, since

45) Testimony of Gen. Geloso. It is not possible not to find the inconceivable lightness of the affirmations of Mussolini, according to reported as such from Geloso.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

part of the forces came from Italy and leaves from the zone of Kalibaki. In this order of provisions, then, the shipment of officers of the Command in order to coordinate the action in place was estimated also in its aspect negative. How can in fact work a Commander if his officers transform themselves into messengers?

On the whole, the action of the *Julia*, for how much conduct with admirable impulse, it is remained sterile of results and it has then created for against a difficult situation for the same *Julia* and for the lateral units, and, as far as the influence exercised on the Korçano subside but in modest proportions.

The connection between the Macedonian-Epirus sectors could be put into effect, at the moment, only because the Greeks did not know in this sector to be useful for the situation.

2) Army corps "Ciamuria".

The position that with euphemism was defined "of arrest" is in truth to consider defense line.

The connection between *Ferrara-Centauro* and the *Siena* are from considering themselves illusory.

The examination of the losses bring to conclude that the enemy does not have the merit of to have demolished the offensive, but the wear and tear of the instrument employed in order many days in an task exceeding its possibilities. That is demonstrated from the fact that:

- from 24 to 28 October, 40 km. are completed in order to attest to the frontier;
- from 28 October to 7 November is bad, is fought and it is persisted in vain in a sour atmosphere and mount and truly prohibitive climate conditions"⁽⁴⁶⁾.

To have nothing to do with some observations of taste rather rhetorical and from a sure sufficiency in the tone of the letter, in the substance the few relief are centered. The Comandante Superiore, that he had to know the real state of the preparation for the imminent campaign well, had estimated this much easy - to the point of consider a "*sweeping away in a few days*" (irony of the expressions!) - underrating the enemy, or little of he knowing, and being themselves formed to the contrary a concept too much elevated of the possibilities of our little units; or, also being well to the current of the things, he had counted to perhaps find the road open or facilitated being based on the results that he could obtain. After all: or he had mistaken in the appreciation of the terms of the operating problem or had headed at factors outside of the military solution.

The first combats poor in evidence that the lines of the maneuver had been seen with clarity, but that the dosage of the forces decidedly was not corrected. In war if they have a value much

46) DSCSTA, f. 143/op. dated 12.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

relative, especially to acquired result, however if the *Julia* had been supported by another mountain division, or if in the sector of Kalibaki the entire *Ciamuria* army corps had been concentrated, probably all the course of the operations would have assumed another withdraw. Little convincing appears a greater impulse eventually given to the action along the shoreline, because this, fed logistically with many difficulties, probably would have run aground in front of the line of the Arachtos. Dwelling on the purpose appears place outside, since the detailed examination of the concerning events the genesis and the beginning of the war since made here seems more than eloquent. It interests, instead, in closing of the first period of the campaign to stop itself on some points leaves you in shadow somewhat: the constitution of the Commands, the logistic organization and the land and air cooperation.

The constitution of the Commands.

And presumably to attribute to the role of protagonist a reserved Visconti Prasca the fact that with much delay has been reached to the articulation of commands of 28 October: the Comando Superiore with two army corps, beyond to numerous other directly employee Commands. In extremis, as previously it has been said, Gen. Carlo Rossi arrived in Albania finding an average Commander of army corps; Gen. Nasci, instead, remained with few officers who he a brought from Italy. If some explanation can be found (but with much good will) for the deficiencies it begins there, both arduous truly to recover some when it and stated that 12 November the headquarters were still not arrived for the two foretold Commands. And, like if the most recent grave experience be sufficient, the disadvantage is repeated for the Commanders of the army and army corps constituted in order to frame the divisions of newly arriving. The more serious aspect did not consist in the deficiency of staff for the operation of the Command, also most important it, but in the nonexistence of true communications centers. The tasks that on 17 November Soddu will be complained of the nearly absolute lack of connections that allow him to get an timely idea of the events, and that on 23 November Gen. Vercellino will explode: "*We are without communications and nearly without motor vehicles! The news only arrives by means of couriers. Is it possible to command an army in this way* "?

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

The logistic organization.

The solution of the logistic problem was seriously conditioned from two negative elements: the decision to begin a war in mountainous atmosphere, with inadequate street net, to the doors of winter, with G.U. not conveniently ordered, and the superficiality with which was considered the necessary resource of maritime transports. With the exception of dealing the entire problem unitarily, after to have examined the development of the operations, is opportune to at least give a signal of the departure situation. To the eve of hostility the works and depots of the *Direzione Superiore dei Servizi d'Albania* were in degree of feeding 150,000 men⁽⁴⁷⁾, 22,000 draft animals, 3,500 motor vehicles and 1,600 motorcycles, with an equal autonomy to 40 days of provisions; 5 units of fire {approximately} for all ammunitions and 2 units of fire for hand grenades; 70 units petroleum oil and lubricants.

The Direzione Superiore obviously had thousand motor vehicles {excluded those of the units}. Not just decided the war, Gen. Francisco Rossi, head of the II Unit of the S.M.R.E., went to Albania in order to control situation thereby existing and in the light of to estimate of the necessities in refueling fact and evacuations the planning of *Contingency G*: the occupation of the Epirus. Already it has been said of his telegraphic proposal of a delay of the operations because of the particularly adverse atmospheric conditions, of the bad conditions of the road net for persistent torrential rains, of the difficulties of unloading of the steamboats. Substantially, but, he judged the logistic apparatus and the consistency of the supplies sufficient for feeding the action of first phase of the troops in place⁽⁴⁸⁾. The weak point, and in truth worrisome, was instead the winter equipment, whose supplies, calculated on the base of the peace necessities, could not support the fast usury of the operating life.

To such partial sufficiency initially, Gen. Rossi one took care of another two issues. And noted that the state of preparation of major unit in Italy reached levels percentages regarding war staff of different the entities, therefore he telegraphed to the office services of the S.M.R.E. that the "*divisions previewed for shipment in Albania must have motor vehicles at one hundred percent*". And, having found that the functionality

47) The effective force on 20 October amounted to 155,000 men, including territorial, carabinieri units, sailors, airmen, financial police, - Albanian units.

48) F. ROSSI *Mussolini e lo Stato Maggiore*, Rome 1951, page 100

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of the Direzione Superiore dei Servizi d'Albania could be only considered acceptable for, the easy first, *phase*, prescribed to the ordering office:

"Before assigning high Commanding officers S.M. & spe. & to dismiss that complement Intendancy 1st, & 4th & 8th Army is necessary to think constitution Intendancy Albania ".

The plan of the alignment for the offensive must specify that it was not possible to complete it before 28 October. The sector of the XXVI army corps, however, was supported two logistics center constituted at Korça, the *Julia* at Erseke, the army corps *Ciamuria* and the Litorale grouping with logistics centers located at Premeti, Argirocastro, Konispoli and Santi Quaranta (port Edda). But if these advanced works, to which all the independent divisions and units made head because of the lacked arrival the services of army corps (according to the norm of pre-war the army corps were ring logistic), could be considered sufficiently near the G.U. in the first formation, their distance from the ports, from which they reached the supplies directly, exceeded the 300 kilometers of bad roadways.

The land and air cooperation.

Without doubt the second disappointment for the troops of Albania, after the operating ability soon shown by the underrated enemy, was the co-operation of our unexpectedly inferior aviation to the unanimous expectation:

"The Commanders of every degree, from those of army corps to those with regiment, the official observatories, the officials of connection, signaled, since the beginning of the campaign, the insufficient participation of the air weapon for tactical bombing, both the number of aircraft online and the fire power. That of the fighters showed itself a share, a lot that the very small Greek air force could roam to its comfort in skies of the battle and bomb our troops. Only our modest squadrons of observation, of which I will say then, supplied to the troops of Albania an arrogant and constant contribution of collaboration"⁽⁴⁹⁾.

From part of the Air Force arose the unpleasant feeling not to see any appreciated own effort, worse still, comprised the possibilities and the limitations of the air support:

49) S. VISCONTI PRASCA, op. cit., pag. 147.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"All the campaign of Greece could, in fact, synthesized in the continuous and pressing appeal" Aviation aid!". Aid against the infantries, the artilleries, the machine-guns, the motor vehicles, the mules of the enemy; against the own lack of arms, provisions, supplying, connections; aid with the bombing, the fight, the dive bombing, the recognition, the transports, aerial supplies "⁽⁵⁰⁾

It is true: very soon the only hope of the infantryman - than more than anyone else suffered - was attended from the sky, inasmuch as from on land the solution appeared impossible. And until to the end of the war the Commanders and the units they did not succeed to become account of because our aerial superiority could not manifest in all its power. To mount of such incomprehension substantial cognitive deficiency of the mutual requirements was one and much a defective organization of the land and air cooperation. And also too much meaningful with regard to, the missed convening of the chief of general staff of the R. Aeronautica to the meeting of 15 October. Of other part the doctrine of employment of aviation stretched to the conception of an aerial war of independent. In fact the bombing - the main means of the air forces - was classified to the strategic field; the special participation in tactical field, often put into effect during the war of Spain, was thought of exceptional character because only the competition of most particular circumstances could justify an action of the sort, considered uneconomical under all the aspects and of rendering not proportionate to the risk and the cost of means.

"In the tactical field - the wrote Gen. Valle, head of G.S. of the R. Aeronautica until to 1939 - of the surface war it is the gun that must have the exclusive feature. The modern armies possess such fire equipment to render the participation of aviation in the zone struck from the artillery absolutely superfluous. That does not mean disinterestedness for how much happens on the will but line of battle, to concur more effectively to the victory operating in more profitable areas "⁽⁵¹⁾.

Also the ground attack, from height very low against objectives of varied nature, was considered normally in the strategic within to integration of the bombing. Inevitable therefore the "ungluing" between the two Armed Forces. The army, basically, had always rather been lose interested in the direct co-operation which it could receive from the air force,

50) G. SANTORO, op. cit., pag. 148.

51) G. VALLE, the doctrine. *La dottrina. Lo spirito*, in *Le Forze Armate dell'Italia fascista*, Rome 1939, pag. 272.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

but not just stated the insufficiency of own means in order to strike the enemy asked the participation from the sky. And when the infantry, quickly worn away, began to resist with difficulty, the outcry rose "Aviation, aid!". Only then the attention of the Air Force was moved onto the battlefield. Even if the strategic activity weakening before having been able to manifest itself fully, the dominion of the air was practically insured, therefore the operating address intended to achieve two goals: on the strategic plan, to hinder the assembled and eventually to provoke a collapse with the bombing of objects in the inside of the country; on that tactical one - always subordinated - to hold the Greeks under the impending tie of the bombing and the strafing, with continuous ware and tear. While protective fighter patrols of the airports, the ports and the alignment of the land forces, nuclei of fighters and bombers had to allow themselves for the whole day on object closely constituted from the opposing device and the lines of communication. Answering more was be a matter of an adaptation of the norm, thought, not hardly the illusions beginning to fall, to the development of the operations and however it was suggested, if not imposed, from the nature of the objects to seek and to strike in a natural mountain atmosphere and on wide zones.

After first of November Pricolo, on the place, he changed the tasks assigned previously to the air forces: the Aeronautical Albania Command had to limit himself, of principle to the area of Korçano while the 4th Squadron would have thought next to the Epirus, but the nonexistence of telephone links made difficult the talk between the Albania Aeronautical Commander and the 4th Squadron Commander in Italy. The communications happened by radiotelegraph and in code and *"above all by means of a senior officer of connection transferring daily in airplane between Tirana and Brindisi. With such means the Albania Aeronautical Commander, based on the demands for the Commander of the Troops and with his understandings, signaled to the Commander of the 4th Squadron the objects for him to strike, the timetables established for the action and the appointments in flight with the protective fighters"*!⁽⁵²⁾

The great reason that induced the Commanders to beg for air support was the insufficiency - or better, the absence than heavy artillery and heavy field for a effective action of preparation, near and far interdiction and counter-battery. But their objectives

52) G SANTORO, op. cit., page, 175-176.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of artillery in a land forms of harsh and broken they sure did not constitute the ideal for the horizontal bombing and, on the other hand, the numerical smallness of the dive bombing aircraft available in successive time (the German Ju 87) will not allow to more use such specialty for a extended period and in consisting formations. Now, in topic of land and air cooperation was hardly to the first steps - like all the rest of pre-war armies - and lacked therefore also the suitable idea one normative and one organization to assure the air support in the picture of the resolution of a tactical problem. At exactly a month from the beginning of the conflict, Soddu addressed to the two commanders of armies in these terms:

"In these days I have instated to the maximum because the action of aviation was to adhere as much as possible to that one of the units of the army.

The results that the Aeronautics has made in purpose of its best.

But it is necessary to become account of the practical possibilities of aviation and to avoid rising of a mentality that considers the aerial bombing as the indispensable element to the resistance, balancing in a sure sense the action of aviation to that one of the artillery.

Remember with the occasion the necessity, when aerial bombing are asked close to you, to indicate always exactly the position of the units"⁽⁵³⁾

In the first period of the war the co-operating between commanders of the two Armed Forces existed only at the level of Visconti Prasca - Ranza. While, however, in all the so to speak preparatory phase effectively the contact was daily*, from 27 October, day in which the Comando Superiore it was carried to Libohovo, such directed relationship stopped, having Gen Ranza. Thought preferable to establish his own Commando at Tirana for a better explanation of the task. A void in the connection was then created. In spite of the agreements taken between the two Commands, since from the beginning took place the absolute, or nearly, lack of mutual understanding. The army demonstrated in order a lot, too much time, not to have clear ideas on how much could be demanded of the aviation; this, in order equally time, did not know to make to understand that what they could give. The result was that on one side the participation question, nearly at once become plea for aid, came continuation from alive recrimination for the insufficiency of the same participation; from the necessary other yields a gasping resource to thousands is makeshift in order to give a remedy to a situation that, in nearly geometric progression,

53) DSCSFAA, f. 1183/op dated 27.11.1940.

* diuturno

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

it was revealed more and more dramatic and for which it had not been a convenient preparation. An example:

"Demanded bombing from Metsovo towards south-east Kalibaki direction and Metsovo towards south-east Macedonian direction. Bombing on eventual enemy concentrations the sector Macedonian-Kastoria – Florina - east of the Pindo from the Macedonian towards the Epirus"⁽⁵⁴⁾

Sure a similar demand, for the same indeterminate of topographical references, could not have that a consequence: the participation of the Aeronautics in independent way, according to nearly the atmospheric conditions of the moment, on objectives that to its judgment they could be useful to the land forces. Another example of the lack of an effective procedure is given from the demands which flowed on 15 November to the Aeronautical Command Albania from part of the Commanders of the major units:

- call 851 "Bomb with fragmentation mount Gollelit & Parados approached interposed let alone combining land astride bridge Dimitri – Lales - hill 1143 of Qafa Todorices";

- call 885 "Urgent demand bomb with fragmentation enemy amassing in zone Borova – Graidani – Cerja - Rakite- Tri

- call 068868 "Demand bomb with fragmentation and strafing positions entire line of resistance Korçiano front, excluded close between Hocisti and Pogri. Bombing enemy batteries mountains Alevitsa and Labanitsa ".

- call 0211221 "Demand aerial bombing: Epirus Sector: Kurtiniza – Mufino – Piklari – road net sector Margariti -bridge on the Kalamas - bridge on the Turizona hill 1090 - hill 1201; Korçia sector: zone Kallogerit- Todorices - right Devoli river between Bozhigradi and Areza "⁽⁵⁵⁾.

In the search of a system that concise unit of language, clarity of reports and timeliness of participation, the Comando Superiore asked to the ministry of the War to interest the General Staff of the Aeronautics for the allocation of three senior officials of connection, to be assigned respective to the Comando Superiore and to the two Army Corps Commands. A forward campaign, after repeated negative experiences, Geloso quite reached to propose that the air forces destined to operate in tactical field with the army passed to his direct command.

54) DSCSFAA, Tele 025364 of Superalba to Albania Aeronautics.

55) Cfr. G. SANTORO, op. cit., page. 199-200.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Evidently the proposal could not be accepted in its formulation, however it is meaningful of the existing ungluing between the two Armed Forces. The fact is that the Achilles' heel of all the war apparatus was represented just from the determining element to the ends of the operating efficiency: a good system of the transmissions. The Commanders of army corps were lacking in radio stations for the connection with observation aircraft. Mid January the Army Commander, in complaining of the deficiency and specifying of to have been able to give *one* R.4A station to the XXV and VIII Corps, while the special army corps had taken to the material and the personnel carried in Albania from *Bari*, urgently asked the Comando Superiore to supply for the recently arrived IV Corps.

Among the many things that must find with bitter perplexity, figure the literal nonexistence of a being possibly embryonic specific organization. Still in the February of 1940 the Supreme Defense Committee *had voted* so that the provisions in course and program came realized very soon giving the priority to the Brindisi - Durazzo telegraphic cable, financed from nearly a year, and to the communications of military interest; nevertheless the availability of the cable was possible only to first of December. In Albania the absolutely unusable civil line existed both for its poor conditions of armament and for the most insufficient reliability in security matters. For the Army part lines did not exist permanent or semi permanent, except the Tirana - Durazzo; from the Aeronautical part, the only line connected the Aeronautical Command with the airport of Tirana. From there achieved that all the communications had to be transmitted by highway transportation, via airplane or by means of radio, in the clear or in cipher. It is easy to imagine which feeling of impotence was generated therefore by the difficult situation.

Naturally, not just the conflict was decided, the Aeronautics was engaged in depth in order to create that did not exist and, just in this area, the contribution that it could supply was unparalleled, because it was thanks to the cession of both pairs of its operating net that the Comando Superiore could be connected at least in sure way with the 11th Army and its main subordinate Commands; the supplied material (100 km of cable and 63 tons was of good phosphorous bronze thread) that the Armed forces high command could to the end realize a

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

own independent telephone net ⁵⁶⁾. To confirmation, where it was need, of the fact that the deficiencies due to desire to *make in a hurry* are *always* translated into a worse result, with a waste of greater time just when this time was lacking, are necessary to specify that only after approximately three months from the beginning of the hostilities the Comando Superiore could be leaned to the aeronautical systems and that the foretold telephone net of the army was available only at the end February 1941.

56) G. SANTORO, op. cit., page 160 and following.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

CHAPTER VII

THE GREEK COUNTEROFFENSIVE
(10 November - 3 December)

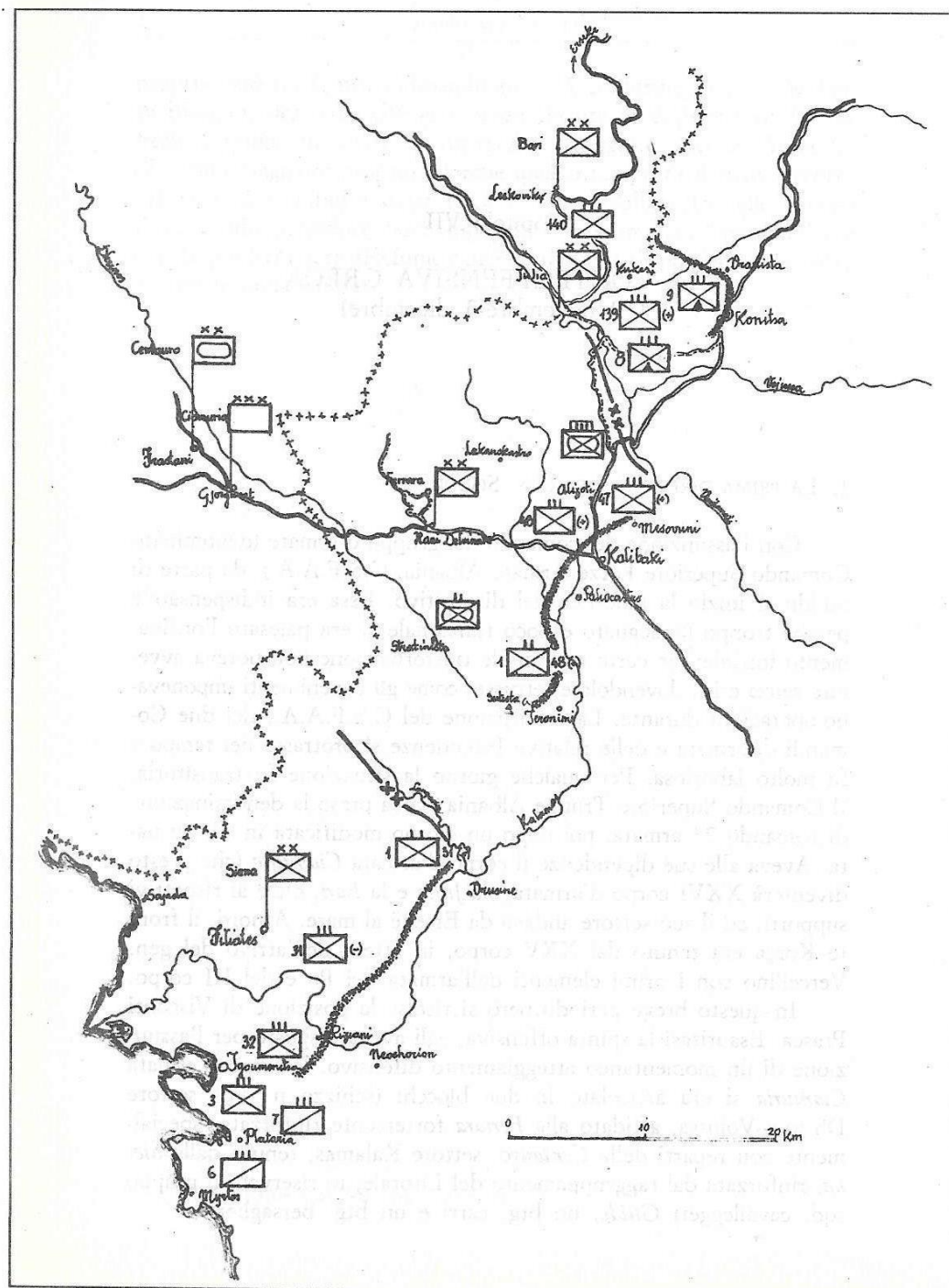
1. THE FIRST DIRECTIVE OF GEN. SODDU.

With the assumption of the command of the army group (Comando Superiore Forze Armate Albania: C.S.F.A.A.), from part of Soddu began the modification of the deployments. It was indispensable because much too inadequate and little functional had revealed the beginning ordering; but sure a similar transformation could not happen without crisis, having to carry it out, as the events imposed, during operations. The constitution of the C.S.F.A.A., the two Commanders of the Armies and the relative Intendancies continued in the tempo and was very laborious. For some day the situation was transitory.

The Comando Superiore Albania Troops had taken to the denomination of command 2nd Army, then after a day modified to the 11th Army. He had under his command the *Ciamuria* Army Corps (than soon will become the XXVI Army Corps), the *Julia* and *Bari*, beyond respective supports units, and its sector went from Ersekë to the sea. To the north, the Korça front was held by the XXV Corps, awaiting the arrival of Gen. Vercellino with the first elements of the Army of the Po and the III Corps.

In this short period but the position of Visconti Prasca was resolved. Exhausting the offensive push, he had decided for the assumption of a momentary defensive attitude. The *Ciamuria* Army Corps had been articulated in two blocks (map n. 31): sector Dhrinos- Vojussa, entrusted to the strongly reinforced *Ferrara*, especially with units of the *Centauro*; Kalamas sector, held from the *Siena*, reinforced from the Litorale grouping; in reserve: a group sqd. cavalry *Guide*, Bn. tanks and Bn. - bersaglieres.

LA SITUAZIONE DELL'11^a ARMATA IL 10 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The conception of the defense was set up on the resistance to the end of the fundamental positions and on the counterattack against enemy elements eventually penetrating between the meshes of the dispositions. In effects, it crosses some existed: from Mt. Sutista to the Longanica torrent there was an void of fifteen or so kilometers online of air, and from the side of the Vojussa reasons did not lack worry. Here, in fact, the Konitsa - Ersekë sector was in rather strenuous preparation entrusted to *Bari*.

In the Kalamas sector, instead, the operating picture appeared to Visconti Prasca in favorable complex, naturally to determined conditions. In this point of view, a very subjective one, he wrote to Soddu a long letter, in which to a little realistic appreciation of the outside situation joined judgments on a sector by now from his jurisdiction (Korça), suggested to the Comando Superiore the line of conduct to adopt and asked for if, in terms more rather definite, practically all reinforces in arrival in Albania. The letter, than for sure lacked tact and sense of opportunity beyond that of objectivity, it was explained with the fact that in short he wanted to constitute the defense of the original design of maneuver and contained the illusion to demonstrate - with a supplement of troops - the goodness of the operations plan:

"As I have communicated with radiogram n. 025868 of the 9th current in the sector of the lower Kalamas have been completed, after an order given by me, at the same time to the consolidation of the bridgehead, facing in direction of Paramitia and Margariti.

The possibility and the facility with which they were completed carry to deduce that their action carried out on the flank of the enemy, are from the *Julia* division, both from the *Siena* division and the Litorale Grouping, were really profitable and that a greater availability of forces would have allow feeding of the succeeded one that was delineated by now clearly. On the lacked possibility such exploitation he has influenced the excessive worry of the attack of the Korçiano front that has determined, on the base of such impression, the influx of the few reinforcements there available, while, for against, the introduction in the Epirus sector of the *Arezzo* division would have allowed for giving that push that has not been possible to put into effect with the troops already engaged.

On the current state of the situation he thinks:

- that one point from the lower Kalamas it can still be profitable and tried;
- this point could prepare and determine the collapse of the fortified sector of the Kalibaki on the way to Janina;
- the same point would have to be made without to lose time, being useful for the period of crisis in which it seems to find the adversary, avoiding that with passing of the weather it can be resumed.

For this action it is necessary to well assure the left flank of the alignment,

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

that is the bridgehead of Koniça. For now, awaiting the *Julia* division, the organization is entrusted to the *Bari* division. But dealing with was hardly a matter of units, new to the fire, physically not too much adapted to the uneasiness of the climate of this season. It would have therefore to be strengthened with solid elements. I ask therefore that the first mountain battalions in arrival - part of the division *Tridentina* (Morbegno Bn., first announced air-transported to Valona) - are started in that sector. I will be able, with the arrival of the others, to render the 1st bersaglieres free who will return as soon as possible as mobile reserve of the Korçiano, where, moreover, I think that the forces to deploy - four beautiful nearly intact divisions - are sufficient (...);

With the aforesaid units it can not in truth, to think next to immediate offensive possibilities and consisting, but joined by next to the two bersaglieres regiments (2nd and 4th) in arrival I will have the possibility of:

- to more better guarantee the mid Kalamas that although watched it constitutes a void between the *Siena* division and the Kalibaki sector and the feature between the left of the *Ferrara* division and Koniça (...);

At the same time, possibly, have an offensive aimed at the litorale sector, addressed especially against the flank of the enemy alignment and for that way to perhaps open the doors at Janina with the collapse of the enemy device (...) ⁽¹⁾.

The effect of the letter was clearly counter-productive. A tightened courier arrived walking the chilly answer of Soddu. It was together:

- a tactics lesson: *"It is necessary to remain in reality. All the directions indicated by You, Excellency, are optimal, but they are not the good directions that resolve the operations, but the possibility to decide over each of the means adapted, serve and feed from lines of suitable operations. Improvised actions, employment little by little of the forces do not have and they will not be able to never have a good outcome. It is first necessary to assure the conquered positions, to opportunely deploy the forces and then to act (...)"*.

- one critical to the situation from him, Visconti Prasca, gave up: *"(...) to adhere itself already therefore to my directives that are intonate of the situation found by me, and consequent to the exhaustion of the offensive push of the operating troops in Epirus (...). Sure knowledge, but, than the forces announced in arrival could not be in place before several days; and that because of the existing unpreparedness in Albania in the field of the road haulages "*;

- an accusation of incoherence: *"You ask from me all the troops now in arrival from Italy in order plug the many leaks you make as would exist in*

1) DSCSFAA, f. 025907 dated 10.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the alignment; and that of front to an enemy who Yourself judged of up to now not superior forces and meanwhile you propose to me to try new actions that appear somewhat risky (...). Of other part do not understand as in the current situation can be thought next to the collapse of the fortified field of Kalibaki on the way of Janina at the same time that asks me urgency for units in relationship to an enemy attack of which he does not come to me specified the consistency, and that manifest in the same area. I see neither as the concept can be conciliated that the enemy is in crisis and that he convene to complete at once aimed against his flank with the affirmation that also obtaining the units demands cannot be thought next to the offensive possibilities (...)";

- a callback to the ethics of command: *"I cannot accept the judgment that the Korçiano sector is exaggerated estimated, because I have visited it personally and of it I know the situation"*;

- a *aut aut** conclusive: *"The note in short a fundamental difference of conception regarding my understandings; and I invite therefore, Excellency, to communicate explicitly your feelings or not than to collaborate with identity of views"*⁽²⁾.

Visconti Prasca did not have the time not to answer. As it has been said previously, in the afternoon of the same day of the 11th, at 17:00, Gen. Geloso was urgently called by Mussolini for the investiture and in evening the radio gave news of the substitution⁽³⁾.

In Korçano, Gen. Nasci tried to give consistency to the embryonic accommodation of the *Venezia* and the *Parma* (sketch n. 32). In Rome the worry for that sector, and especially for defensive position of Ersekë, was strong. With to the communication that the units in the reinforcements transported by airplane or armed motor-ship would be by necessarily arriving unproved of motor vehicles, baggage train and good part of the material of the organic equipment, the express S.M.R.E. without many periphrasis the own restlessness inviting to consider the situation of the Macedonian front, holding above all present the eventuality that Greece, hardly safe from the Bulgarian side, was driving other divisions from Thrace, and arranging that they all were also taken

2) DSCSFAA, f. s.n. R.P., dated 11.10.1940.

3) The official notice circulated from the EIAR was the following: *"at present the Greek divisions operating on the front or that they will be sent to constitute the Army group with Albania, whose the 9 command has been currently assumed by Gen. Ubaldo Soddu., the Armys included in the Group are the 9th and the 11th, to command the 9th has been chosen Gen. Mario Vercellino, currently commander of the Army of the Po, to command the 11th Gen. Carlo Geloso, currently commander of the 3rd Army "*. Gen. Visconti Prasca remained in command of the 11th Army until 15 November.

* Latin = to give or deliver an ultimatum

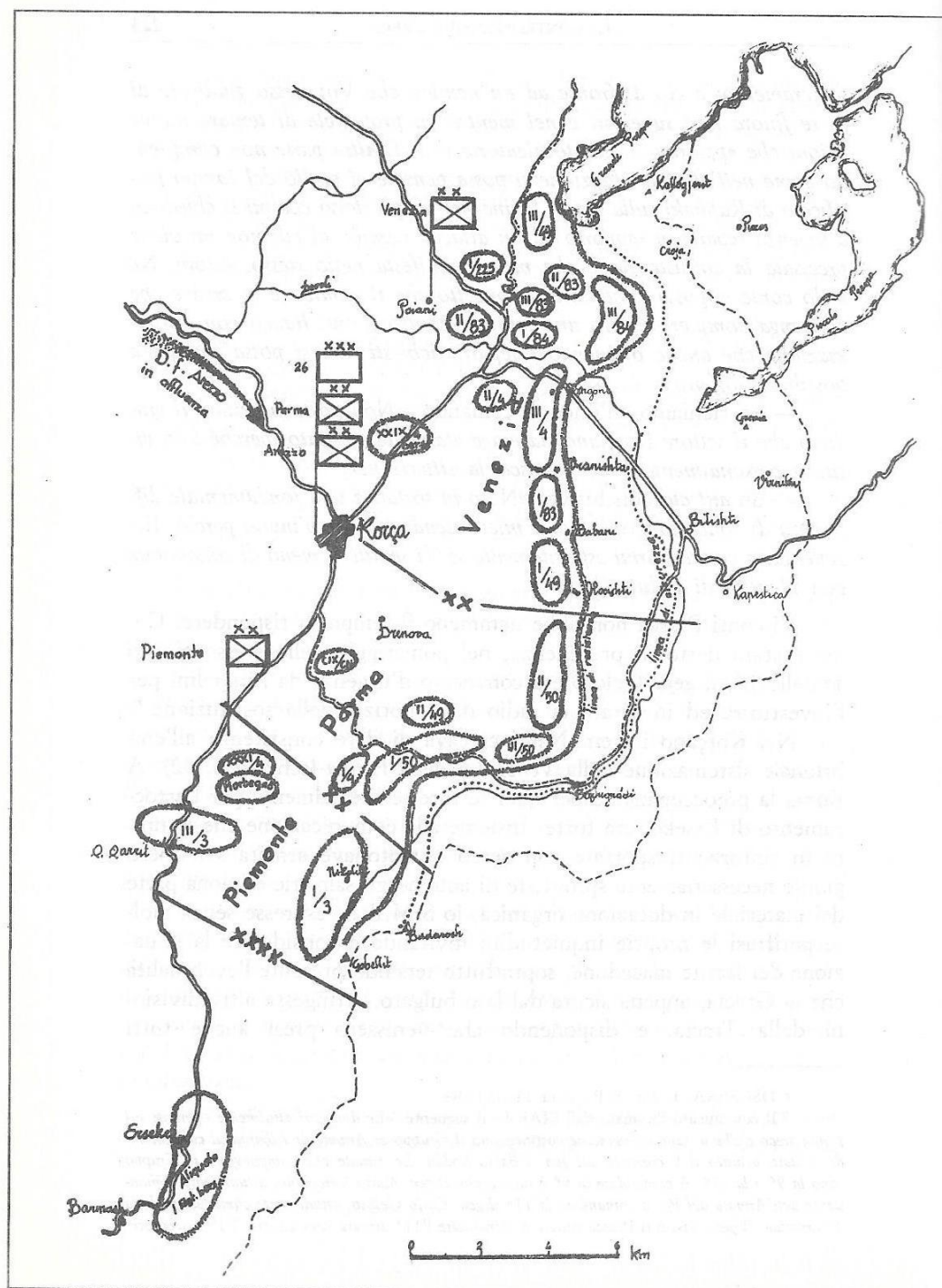
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 224

The alignment of the XXVI Army Corps on 12 November

Schizzo n. 32

LO SCHIERAMENTO DEL XXX CORPO NEL KORCANO IL 12 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

provisions in order to complete (but better would have been well to say to begin) the defense of the reduced one center in correspondence of the Greek theater. Moreover he emphasized the indispensability to absolutely guarantee *"the possession of the road net that connects the Korciano sector with that one of the Epirus via Q. Qarrit and Ersekë"*⁽⁴⁾.

Also the Albanian inner panorama appeared opportunely very different from that painting from Ciano and Jacomoni. The beginning of the hostilities had not lacked reawakened ferment between the hostile elements to we could succeed some appreciate in the masses, a few disposed bear sacrifices for a cause judged of nearly exclusively of Italian interest, even if some atmospheres were sensitive to territorial widening. This state of general mind on one side explains the facility with which the Greek and Yugoslavian intelligences could collect in Albania news of military character, from the other the reluctance or the aversion that was to the origin of the episode of the *Tomori* battalion, of the desertion of officers and soldiers escaped beyond the border, and of the spread of anti-Italian pamphlets. It took, between among other things, the consistency voice of King Zog had hired personal for the constitution of bands destined to carry out actions of guerrilla or also of simple banditry in the inside of the country, and was gone emphasizing the propaganda against the Italian occupation, especially the work of memori nationalists of the events of 1920-21.

In this Soddu climate emanated, therefore, "Directive n. 1": it did not say a lot, and perhaps a lot could not say in wait to reorder the operating instrument, but it defined the main features for the alignment to reach. The 11th Army had to guarantee the sure possession of the bridgehead of the Igoumenitsa and of the zone of Konitsa, considered, first the which possible base for the future prosecution of the effort towards the south or south-east the second of which is the weak point of the dispositions. The 9th army, and momentarily for the XXVI Corps, had to retake the heights to north of the Devoli comprised between the two lakes of Prespa with the goal to decide of a optimal flank in order to strike with the fire the right flank of the enemy proceeding along furrows of the Devoli; to south, instead, opposing enemy actions tending to the road of Ersekë. The sector limits: Ersekë - Mt. Ostravicë - Berat.

The day of the 11th arrived at Tirana Gen. Vercellino; the 12th were the time for Gen. Arisio destined to III Army Corps; the 15th, in the late afternoon, arrived Gen. Geloso.

4) DSCSFAA. f. 5079 dated 9.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

While the arrival was begun disorderly, because decided directly by Mussolini, of the reinforcements from Italy.

The 1st alpine valley group was found at Valona with the battalions *Val Feila*, *Val Tagiamento*, *Val Natisone*, but without draft animals nor material because they were being air-transported. The mountain division *Tridentina* (Gen. Santovito) was flowed with a small share of its units: the Commander of the 5th alpine with the battalion *Tirano*, the Commander of the 6th alpine with the *Verona* battalion and the mountain group of *Bergamo* was disembarks at Durazzo; the *Morbegno* and *Edolo* battalions, carried in aircraft to Tirana, were already arrived in truck to Korça. All lacked baggage train and materials. The 42nd infantry and the 29th artillery (with a single group) of the *Modena* were as soon as it disembarks at Valona, while the division was still concentrating itself at Bari. One M 13 tank battalion was disembarked at Durazzo.

To the same date of 15 November, after a week of presence and to twenty-four hours from the beginning of the Greek counter-offensive, Soddu therefore represented the things to the deputy of the S.M.R.E.:

"The enemy has begun yesterday an action in force, developing great pressure in the Korciano sector and attacking in correspondence of the zone of Ersekë: that with the obvious goal to divide our forces.

In the Korciano sector the enemy is successful to carry himself in contact with our line of resistance, than moreover it does not turn out up to now make inroads into it. In the Ersekë zone the enemy has gotten hold of our positions in correspondence of the boundary stones 7 and 8 and our counterattack in order to resume such positions is bankrupt. In the night and at dawn it has delivered attacks towards Leskoviku (...).

Characteristic common to all the theater of operations:

- unit with linear alignment, enormous fronts, battalions intermingled being sent online one by one as they arrive (the rearrangement of the alignment would demand calm and time);

- Commanders of G.U.: arriving in zone now commanded by the 9th Army, III and VIII C. d'A. with few officers, and only a few at a time (XXV and XXVI C. d'A.) still without organs for their operation, so much that his Excellency Vercellino has declared yesterday, that is not possible, in puts into effect the conditions for assuming command⁽⁵⁾;

5) The next day, Gen. Geloso, had just assumed the command of the 11th Army, he telegraphed to the C.S.F.A.A.:

"n. 042228 *stop* I find indefensible logistic situation truly impressive & I fear *stop* Commodities in the warehouses insufficient for total troops especially paste & flour *stop* lack indispensable kinds of comfort while troops are seriously engaged *stop* insufficient number furnaces for bakeries (...) some units like that Bari division totally lack cartage & baggage train *stop* all the services are insufficient *stop* most urgent shipment to Tepeleni at least 5 daily rations consumptions wine & kinds comfort that refers destined Valona to me where I cannot send to capture...?.. roads pretty average *stop* ".

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Order of battle of the Italian forces on 16 November 1940	
Comandante superiore F.A. Albania (Gen. U. Soddu)	
9 th Army (Gen. Vercellino) with: III Army Corps (Gen. Arisio) with: <i>Venezia</i> Inf. Div. (Gen. Bonini); <i>Arezzo</i> Inf. Div. (Gen. Ferone); supports and services XXVI Army Corps (Gen. Nasci) with: <i>Parma</i> Inf. Div. (Gen. Grattarola); <i>Piemonte</i> Inf. Div. (Gen. Naldi); supports and services. Intendancy: not still constituted.	
11 th Army (Gen. Geloso) with: VIII Army Corps (Gen. Bancale) with: <i>Bari</i> Inf. Div. (Gen. Zaccone then Gen. D'Havet); <i>Julia</i> Alp Div. (Gen. Girotti); supports and services XXV Army Corps (Gen. to C. Rossi) with: <i>Ferrara</i> Inf. Div. (Gen. Zannini); <i>Siena</i> Inf. Div. (Gen. Gabutti); <i>Centauro</i> Arm. Div. (Gen. Magli); supports and services Intendancy: not still constituted.	
Advanced intendancy (Gen. Marfuggi, then Scuero). Air Force Commander Albania (Gen. Ranza). Naval Commander (Amm. Sportiello).	

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

- maneuver impossibility, for lack both of reserves and of means of transport.

In total are had 29 Bns. Inf. and 11 gr. art. on the Korciano front; 32 Bnd. Inf., 3 Bns. tanks, the 16 gr. art. and 6 gr. cav. on the Epirus front, excluding the Albanians on which cannot have confidence.

This state of fact, reassumed for item sums, is not susceptible of ready improvements, resorting to aerial transports which, in part their precariousness (...), are limited to only carry men supplies of arms and ammunitions, but does not deprive of motor vehicles and draft animals and therefore with ability for life and strongly reduced action.

To this purpose, good part of the units online, lacking in services for to have been transported with airplane or motor vehicles, are not in conditions for carrying out a defended maneuvered, here more than ever necessary.

Such situation, which it turns out from previous long series of most serious improvidences and deficiencies, they also weigh on the following circumstances:

- I do not have any unit nor any artillery to my direct disposition;
- the enemy attack on all the fronts, supported from remarkable artillery and air forces which, beyond that the troops online, shoot at with insistence Durazzo, Valona and the two fields of Korça and Argirocastro;
- the situation of the evacuation of the ports and the shipment of the supply rations and ammunitions is little satisfactory because the insufficient means available are all employed for troops transport.

That being (...) considered the eventuality of having to assume more rear positions, more forts and therefore more economic, but, having to send the same troops online, the performance of this concept is resolved in a withdraw that I will execute alone if compelled, in basis to a rigorous and serene examination of the situation and possibly of initiative, rather than under the enemy pressure.

But I do not hide the difficulty of such withdraw given the abundance of artillery and means of the adversary and - for against - the deficiencies of baggage train and motor vehicles of our units especially in the Korciano field.

I think necessary that here the *Trieste* motorized Division is sent in all diligence also - that is ready and, given its mobility, is the unit more adapted to the present circumstance. Disembarkation at Durazzo. That have nothing to do with the influx of the *Pusteria* and *Modena* divisions of which have to accelerate the shipment.

Conclusion:

- a) the situation can evolve towards the necessity of a withdraw;
- b) utopian solutions do not exist;
- c) it does not remain that to face the events with coldness, in order to earn at least one score of days: the indispensable minimal period in order to allow the inflow of adapted reinforcements"⁽⁶⁾.

Moreover Soddu added a memorandum, plus personal, in which he emphasized the departure situation, the development of the initial effort, the operating perspectives and the issue of the land and air cooperation. In saying exactly he repeated, meaningfully, a concept:

6) DSCSFAA, f. 261/op. dated 15.11.1940.

*guernire

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

already "(...) in his [of the Comandante Superiore] mind shows itself the serious eventuality of having to order to a withdraw on rear positions in very difficult conditions how much, from part of troops of insufficient efficiency and under the action of the enemy, action that, also not being itself up to now manifested under particular aspect of power, stretched to take advantage of moral conditions and favorable acclimatizes" ⁽⁷⁾.

As far as the units of the wing *marciante*, being diffused a uncertainty state of mind. Being clearly to that the things were not going as hoped - but truly it would have been more appropriated to say "as fact to hope" - the enthusiasms begin had fallen and the deficiencies in logistic field were emerging more and more quickly. Such particular situation of unstable equilibrium seems represented very well from a letter that the commander of the *Siena* - division, is attended, than it had not still had to exceed difficulty of tactical order as nearly all major unit - Gen. Rossi wrote:

"Believe I have signaled, in way of total classified, the situation of the troops of employed by me in relation to the deriving uneasiness is from the atmospheric adversities at the time, both from the particular they conditions connected to the insufficient communications and difficulty of supply. Premised that the spirit of the units maintains itself very high and deserving of every praise, I must represent that it comes made to wonder if the present attended situation of and preparation will last presumably still to long, in order to be able itself to regulate on the degree of accommodation to give to the units.

Indeed the troops as they are now located, in part in trench, in part behind for the protection of the flanks or in potential, do not currently enjoy not even the minimum of material comfort that was succeeded to having also in the world war (...)"⁽⁸⁾.

2. THE GREEK COUNTEROFFENSIVE PLAN.

In the first decade of November, approval the favorable course of the operations and the satisfactory development of the assembled mobilization and of the Greek High Command placed the question mark of the strategic line of conduct to assume, holding present the beginning of the winter season. According to the official reports:

"The successes of the initial period of the war in the Epirus, in the Pindo and also in western Macedonia, they have had a strengthening effect. In the Epirus

7) DSCSFAA, Memorandum S.n. dated 15.11.1940.

8) DS of the *Siena* Inf. Div., dated 13.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

the adversary has not been able to obtain a concrete success; in the Pindo it has not only been arrested his penetration but its forces have been destroyed; in the western Macedonian the Greek local actions have been crowned by positive outcome. The elevated moral obtained of the troops in relation to these successes, almost no effects from Italian aviation against our movements of assembled and limited in the bombing on the front, and the insignificant results attainable from the medium tanks on the enemy, have contributed to open greater horizons to Comando Supremo"⁽⁹⁾.

He was dealing with to choose between three possible solutions. First of all, to arrest himself temporarily on the IBa line but, the arrival of the winter, limiting themselves to only garrison the mountain passes with a share of the forces, than for the supply they would have been leaned to the villages to east of said line, where they would have been amassed sufficient supplies timely. In the meantime the bulk would have been moved to the rear so as to allow them to spent the winter in a more comfortable atmosphere. When then the conditions at the time had concurred the resumption of the operations, the said bulk would have been brought back forward. In other words, it was dealt to make to take to the troops the winter quarters. The negative aspect of this solution was represented from the abandonment - in practical - of the position, with the consequent facility for the Italians of installing them with alpine units. The second possibility consisted in the activation of the IBa line in the feature to the west valleys of the Sarandaporos with the only forces thought indispensable and in withdrawing the others to east of the Pindo for the winter. In this picture it was necessary to place a tending attack to assure the full availability of the Barasani-Konitsa road junction, of major importance for the regularity of the supply to the units to leave in situated. Finally, third solution, that radical existed one: to carry the alignment to the west of the chain of the Grammos and to resupply it with the Gianina – Ersekë - Korça road, constituted the doubling, advanced, of the line of communications Gianina – Metsovo - Grevena - Kastoria- Korça. Given to the evidence of the advantages of varied order offers from such third possibility, the choice fell on it. However a substantially defensive understanding appears clearly that to the basis of the decision not offensive strategic will was one, but, in compliance with the existing directives.

In the meantime many arguments were elapsed on the attitude to take in western Macedonian. Gen. Pitsikas, commander of the SAMO, since 4 November had ordered to the III army corps

9) Greek S.M.E., op. cit., vol. II, page 229-230.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to occupy with local actions susceptible positions to constitute lines of departure for the conquest of the Morova let alone to carry ahead, in the zone of Kastoria, the 10th division. The II army corps, instead, had to realize a solid extension of the front held from the III and to get hold, also, of useful positions for the attack towards the basin of Korça. Pitsikas was regulated on the basis of the planning of the September: at first turning of the Morova from north to south by means of two contemporary attacks exercised respective from the peninsula of Pixos and the Grammos; in the second phase an total occupation of the Morova.

Then on 6 November the Supreme Command ordered to accelerate the times in order to get hold as first as possible of Suhagora and Morova and to head decidedly at Korça. The operating design of Gen. Tsolakoglou, commander of the III Corps, was founded on an operation to deliver by surprise, renouncing also to the preparation of artillery to both sides of the Morova (sketch n. 33).

The beginning of the operation was previewed for the 06:30 of 11 November. But to this point developed series of arguments. The plan, being approved of from the Supreme Command, was also not shared from Pitsikas, that he thought the resolution excessive risky and he took part in order to block the order. Then he sent an officer of his own General Staff to the III Corps in order to remind to Tsolakoglou that his first task was to assure integrity of the IBa line, and therefore to being necessary to maintain the forces intact to the garrison of such position, let alone in order to place in doubt the good outcome of the operation being the organizational unpreparedness, in special way in the field of the hoard of ammunitions, since the three demanded units of fire were still not arrived but in minimal part.

To such Tsolakoglou reasons he opposed other arguments. First of all the availability of troops was, according to him, more than sufficient in order to allow in any case the occupation of the line IBa. Maintain moreover the necessity of a fast offensive in order to avoid that the Italians strengthened themselves, and, for how much concerned ammunitions, asserted that quantitative the existing in that moment was enough in order to begin the combat, the rest would be reached action during. Not persuaded and not satisfied, Pitsikas sure maintained on the negative, asking however Tsolakoglou a declaration written circa the possibilities attributed to the enterprise and the more suitable time for an

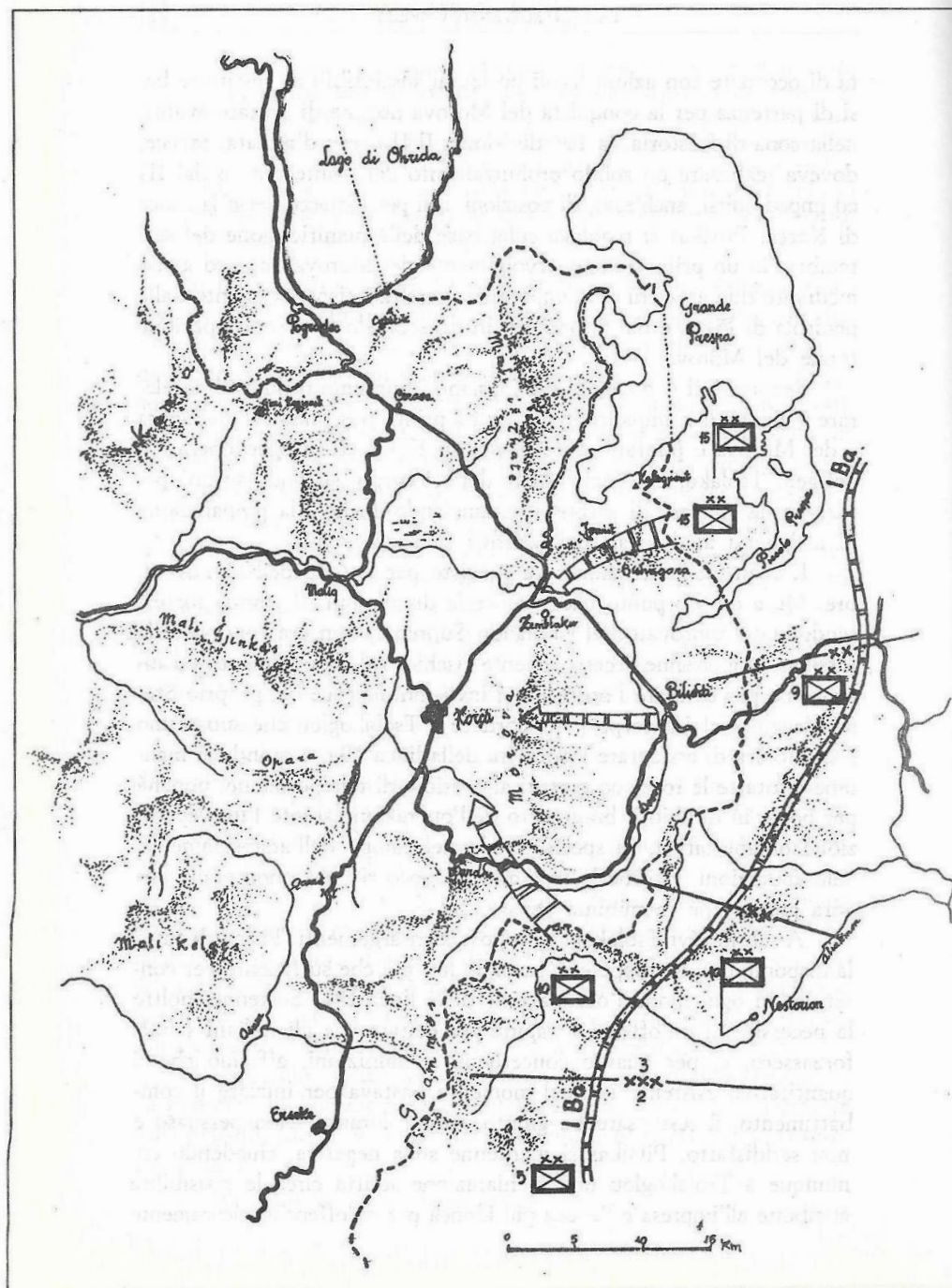
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 232

The Greek operating design in W. Macedonian

Schizzo n. 33

IL DISEGNO OPERATIVO GRECO IN MACEDONIA OCCIDENTALE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

favorable offensive⁽¹⁰⁾. But not only, on 8 November, when the Supreme Command invited without periphrasis to determine the date of the attack to Morova it expressed in equally explicit terms: the II Army Corps could assure the IBa line from the Grammos to the Smolika and also to assume aggressive initiatives of local character, but not to undertake an action to wide breath; the III Army Corps, inasmuch as the hoard of the demanded supply was still from, to complete, did not turn out, of the par, in a position to participating to an offensive on immense scale.

About it achieved that he did not think of being able to establish the date for the attack on Morova and excluded, in all the cases, of being able to make it in a cycle of a few days. At the same time but he ordered the II Corp to yield to the III the 11th division (less three battalions) for the much discussed offensive and to send it in the zone of Nestorion. Approval this hardening, Gen. Papagos sent an official of the operations section of the Supreme Command to the SAMO and the Commander of the III Corps, in order to collect precise indications and to be able to decide personally.

The thesis of the Section of the army, also remaining negative, better formed the point of view. According to the plan of 8 October, the action against the Morova and Korça had to be lead from the II and III Army Corps, but currently the II, being be seriously engaged in the Pindo, did not appear more usable as programmed. The Italians had three divisions, therefore the lead Greek attack with as many divisions could have achieved tactical success, but not decisive. The date for the beginning of the offensive could be determined for the 18 or 19 November, because at that time they would have been available the 13th division (already in influ from Alessandropoli), the 17th division of new constitution to Salonicco and the 11th division that was arriving from the Epirus and only with these forces the plan would have been realized with one such power to concur to catch up Korça and to open immense perspectives.

Instead Tsolakoglou was firm in renewing his own conviction of being in a position to beginning the operation at once also. The envoy of the Supreme Command then tried a compromise between the two ways to see, for which in definitive was of both the parts accepted the date of 14 November. But Pitsikas, put as condition that the III Corp was reinforced at once by the divisions 11th and 13th Papagos received

10) Greek S.M.E., op. cit., vol. II, page 227.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the proposal, very aware of the convenience not to lose time, and in its instructions of 12 November specified that the SAMO, after the conquest of the Morova and in case the circumstances - to its judgment - they were appeared favorable, had to try to penetrate mainly in depth: at least until to lake Maliq and possibly until the positions that dominate the mountain outlets to north and the west of the basin of Korça. More to south it had to interdict with the artillery fire the road net of Ersekë and, where the situation had taken a good turn in the zone of Konitsa, could push its point ahead in order occupying Leskoviku.

On the Pindo was found the II Army Corps, also framed it in the SAMO, with a complementary task regarding that one entrusted to the III Corp and of competition with regard to the fixed action for the troops of the Epirus. Such task consisted in the occupation of Mt. Vashes and the threat towards Leskoviku-Ersekë, to render concrete if the events had been carried out as hoped.

After all, the Greek Supreme Command meant to assign to the battle that it was implanting, and whose organization and conduct entrusted to the SAMO, as goal the conquest of Morova and possibly the availability of the line of communications of Ersekë. Any decision on the ulterior development of the offensive was considered premature and not possible to plan. To reach the objective, the prosecution of the effort, that is the occupation of the basin of Korça and relative western valley outlets, was bound to the formal decision, time debit, of Papagos, on explicit proposal of the SAMO and in the understanding that were be a matter of simple exploitation of the success - it is worth to say that the Italian withdraw had created an void between the two dispositions - and *not* of a second battle to implant *ex novo*⁽¹¹⁾.

The Epirus was the sector that, for the moment, the Supreme Commander considered secondary. The I Army Corps had been delivered up, independent, with three divisions of infantry and one of cavalry. Here he was dealing with simply to reach Kalamas and possibly the border exercising a twofold effort: along guiding the Gianina - Argirocastro and Konitsa- Melissopetra; gravitating astride of this last date the importance attributed to the roadway of Konitsa and the crossroads of Perati.

11) Greek S.M.E., op. cit. vol. III: The Greek counter-offensive, page 8.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Order of battle of the Greek forces on 14 November 1940	
I Army Corps (Gen. Demestikas) with:	2 nd Inf. Div. (Gen. Labdas); 3 rd Inf. Div. (Gen. Bakos); 8 th Inf. Div. (Gen. Katsimitros); cavalry Div. (Gen. Stranotas); supports and services.
Section of Western Macedonian Army (Gen. Pitsikas) with:	II Army Corps (Gen. Papadopoulos) with: 1 st Inf. Div. (Gen. Vrachnos); 5 th Inf. Bd. (Col. Kalis); cavalry Bd. (Col. Dimaratos); supports and services.
III Army Corps (Gen. Tsolakoglou) with:	9 th Inf. Div. (Gen. Zigouris); 10 th Inf. Div. (Gen. Kitsos); 15 th Inf. Div. (Gen. Metaxas); supports and services.
Supports and services of army.	
Section of Eastern Macedonian Army (Gen. Bakopoulos).	
Strategic reserve:	4 th Inf. Div. (Gen. Sterghiopoulos); 16 th Inf. Div. (Col. Georgantas); 17 th Inf. Div. (Gen. Basakidis).

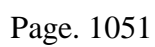
Of this device the S.I.M. had characterized the five divisions deployed on the Macedonian front (three of the III Corps and two in reserve), although clear but with a pair of indicated errors; the 1st division of the II Corps, but not the two brigades considered as a G.U. distinguished, 8th and 3rd divisions to of the Corps, with some uncertainty on the existence of a third division grouping other units of which the presence had been marked. A reconstruction, therefore, enough precise.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

In conclusion, in the sector of Korça 80,000 Greeks with 198 guns and 45,000 Italians with 208 guns find themselves; in the field of Ersekë - Leskoviku, 32,000 Greeks with 114 guns and 23,000 Italians with 112 guns; in the sector of the Epirus: 80,000 Greeks with 184 guns and 47,000 Italians with 248 guns. In strategic reservoir: 40,000 Greeks with 60 guns against null from the Italian side. But they were in arrival to the front, because already disembarked in Albania, troops for approximately 10,000 men.

3. THE BATTLE FOR KORÇA

"Gen. Vercellino, hardly reached Tirana and render account even if for the top heads of the state of the things, asked immediately necessary for the operation and the articulation of the Command of the army: the 9th engineers grouping and the 7th truck regiment, both of the army of the Po. Then at dawn of the 13th moved to Korça in order to take contact with the Gen. Nasci. Also still not having assumed the assignment, he specified the understanding to resist in place, since it appeared to exclude, for the moment, whichever plan of offensive; therefore he indicated as sector limit between constituting the III Corps and the XXVI that one in action between *Venezia* and *Parma*; finally it decided that the medium field artilleries grouped astride of the roadway of Devoli valley and of Dardhë so as to be able to be moved timely to the eventual fluctuations of the fight. After that he returned to Tirana leaving to Korça some officers of the G.S. and the army artillery Command lend temporary service near the XXVI Corps and to acquire acquaintance of the alignment. When, therefore, the Greek counter-offensive had beginning, they were online (sketch n. 34): the *Venezia* with eleven battalions of varied origin from the lake of Prespa to the parallel of Hoçishti, with center on Mt. Ivanit and in correspondence of the narriws of the Devoli; the *Parma* with five Bn. from Hoçishti until to the slopes of Mt. Lofka, obstruction of the saddleback of Dardhë; the *Piemonte* with four Bn. until to the Qarrit pass, like right flank of the army. To the rear was the *Arezzo* arriving. It can be said that the sector of the Italian G.U. corresponded largely to those of the three Greek divisions. A clear indicative title, the relationship of the opposing forces, from north to south, saw 11 Bns. Italian against 12 Bns. Greek (15th Division) in the Ivanit-Bilishti sector; 5 Bns. against 6 (9th Division) in the sector of Dardhë and 4 Bns. against 13 and 2 groups of



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

recognition (10th division) in the Grammos sector. Draft of values simply indicated for a twofold reason: because they changed on the single front of attack and because the wide employment from Greek side of temporary inter-army groupings, frequently variable of entity, does not allow determination of it from time to time.

At 06:30 of the 14 November slowly the Greek battalions in first group left the lines of departure, approaching the front margin of the security zone. In the region of the lakes the position of Mt. Ivanit, characterizing element the slash of the Suhagora, was most important for both the contenders. Massive, the full of rocks, with steep walls, it constituted the hinge of the defense and the determining objective for the attack. Here the Greek frontal attack failed completely. In compensation, towards evening, on all the front of the Morova, the units of the 15th Inf. Div. they were arrested at the Devoli, that one of the 9th Inf. Div. they exceeded in the southern part of the sector.

The outcome of the first day was judged satisfactory by the Greek III Corps, thinking realized the breach of the defensive position both on the Suhagora and towards the pass of Dardhë. In reality still null of this had success, be a matter itself simply of the security zone, however the Greeks had acquired good points of support for the development of the successive actions and their pressure had been well perceived from Nasci, who wrote to Soddu asking him to complete the *Arezzo* and to sent the mountain battalions *Edolo* and *Tirano* of the *Tridentina*. The reinforcements was as well as more urgent in as much as the day before had been necessary to send to Ersekë - entrusted to the XXVI Corps - troops to strengthen that isolated garrison. For his part, Tsolakoglou reported to the SAMO "*to have engaged all his forces, to be short of reserves and to preview for the next day the employment of mechanized means from part of the enemy*". Consequently, Pitsikas Ordered:

"As a result of today's contact with the enemy position, to organize consecutive blows on narrow front, in relation to means available, and in direction of the vital objectives. To exercise these efforts with the greater amount of possible artillery and with deep alignment of infantry. To send orders for approval by means of a courier"⁽¹²⁾.

Tsolakoglou but did not have the time, nor probably the desire, to modify the dispositions already given, therefore he let his troops proceeded according to the original operating design. The

12) Greek S.M.E., op. cit., vol. III, page 47

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

15th division (Gen. A Metaxas) was limited to improve the own tactical situation and to face the counterattacks of the *Venezia*, inasmuch as to its left in the zone of Bilishti - Kapestica was becoming part in first lines the 13th division (Gen. Razis). The 9th division (Gen. Zigouris) instead continued in the effort towards the right side of Dardhë, recording in the P.R. in correspondence of Bozhigradi. More to the south, the 10th division (Gen. Kitsos), asserted on the ridge of the Grammos, had shown oneself on the western slope of the chain.

The results achieved by the Greeks in the first two days could seem limited, if the pressure exercised everywhere was uniform had not nearly prevented although the minimal movement of Italian forces from one sector to the other, and if the threat on the not well defended Dardhë and the defenseless Ersekë it had not been outlined as an eliminable difficulty.

At 16:00 of 15 November Soddu meet at Tirana the commanders and the chiefs of the G.S. of the two Armies for a combined examination with the situation. The first aspect, that logistic one, turned out extremely serious, because it was illusory to think to a prompt organization of the services. Geloso, just now arrived from Rome, reported that in the last conference he had with Roatta it had been by both men summoned on the opportunity of giving to priority to the completion of the more important services (health, transports, commissariat and artillery). The shipment of troops could be programmed in according to request, some separate exceptions. However the events in course appeared to Soddu as serious from to induce attributing top priority to the transport of units ⁽¹³⁾. These arrived, in effects, with good speed but, failed to fulfill and inserted in a defective organism and incomplete, they did not supply the rendering that could have given.

How much then to the operating attitude, the radical transformation from offensive in defensive already had been taxed by the events. Our weakness, than fortunately had not been - and it never was - estimated from the adversary to the own point, will be the cause of daily losses of land according to here and there of the momentary directions of attack of the enemy, everywhere by now nearly advanced, and will end with the transform in a periodic general withdraw of the line under the insistence

13) At 19:40 Nasci telephoned to Lt. Col. Fornara) head of the operations section of the Armed forces high command: "*continuous enemy pressure on all the front stop notes emphasized infiltrations stop has employed all the troops available stop send urgency to me all which is available*". (DSCSF AA, dated 15.11.1940).

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Greek, with losses not closely indispensable of men, arms and materials. Moreover, wanting at all costs to be obstinate to hold as much as more could of Albania with insufficient forces was leading unavoidably to a fragmentary and illogical employment of the forces that arrived from the mother land. It was necessary after all - and without to lose time, to find a solution that it guaranteed to face for a long period the enemy counter-offensive; it prevented, with the support of strong natural strong points not easy conquerable, that succeeded tactical Greek premises they were transformed in strategic successes; it allowed the influx to regulate of the reserves and to their collection backed by good positions, in manner from being able to lead counterattacks with tidy forces; it gave the way to prepare, at the same time, the means for the future offensive resumption. It was not easy.

The only one way of escape could naturally be given from a voluntary and deep withdraw on a strong line; how much short possible in order to save forces and to hold more detached contact those engaged to defend it; more convenient logistically in order to allow rations operation of the services also with the limited means then available. The line that appeared most suitable for an able alignment to maintain itself along against superior forces was, for the 9th army, that one constituted from the important mountain to Pogradec - east combination of the Kamia- narrows of the Devoli between Mt. Lenijes and Çuka and Bofnjes - Ostravic. In the sector of Ostravice the joint between the two Armies had to be established, according to the sector limit: Fushes-Q. Qarrit-Q. Martës-Q. Gostanka- Tomori-Gostime.

The following morning (16 November) the Senior Commander emanated directives n. 2⁽¹⁴⁾ and 2 bis⁽¹⁵⁾, to confirmation of much established in meeting of the evening. Moreover he specified that the 9th army would have received the *Trieste* Mot. Div. and the *Pusteria* Alp. Div; that on the first rear defensive position outlined with the new units as was necessary to create one and that the eventual withdraw was subordinated to the preventive approval of the Comando Superiore.

In evening Gen. Vercellino, approvals the orders already given by gen. Nasci and from Gen. Arisio, circulated his first directives foreshadowing that on 17 November he would have assumed the command of the army. With it they fixed the task puts into effect them for the unit: to arrest to the enemy, demolishing any new attempt at advancing, and take back, as soon as possible,

14) DSCSFAA, f. 294/op, dated 16.11.1940.

15) DSCSFAA, f. 301/op, dated 16.11.1940,

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

the front to the border line. It indicated moreover ordering and conduct to hold. In that order he touched at once on a much serious issue, that although all the efforts were destined to aggravate themselves in acute way. Already the harmful intermixing among the units created by force of circumstances was emerged in all evidence, which: the scarcity of forces begins and the necessity of strengthen the defense in this or that sector, once outlined the enemy axis of effort; the arrival in succession of times of the *Venezia* and the insertion of its units between those online; influx of the single battalions from the particular characteristics of employment that they had suggested some use in determines features of the forehead. First of all he wanted a reserve own: *Venezia* (that it was reordering) and the 4th bersaglieri. Therefore he spoke about the organic reconstitution of the units:

"The circumstances puts into effect has taxed the alignment for battalions. The commanders of the C.A. supply, with direct understandings between them, to the reconstitution of organic ties of regiment and division. Such reconstitution, also being urgent, meets currently serious difficulties; therefore it will have to be carried out with character of slow progressiveness, so as to avoid to find itself in crisis of movement in case of attacks in forces. Until when that cannot be adhered, the division commanders will hold to their orders the troops that currently act in the respective sectors"⁽¹⁶⁾.

Then he established that the available artillery – very limited - was engaged totally in the actions of obstruction, to the goal to avoid of the premature location. More he could not say some to make. To part, in the picture of the measures connected with the hypothetical withdraw, he specified the course of the new defensive position: a line that, to semicircle, went from the Ostravice to the heights to east of Pogradec. The breach of the contact had to come facilitated retrograde deployments on the alignment western Peshkopie-margin of the Maliqpendici lake of the western importance of the basin of Korça, and organizing on the rear P.D. obstructions to astride of the main directions of penetration: Pogradec and the furrow of the Devoli. To keep in mind Soddu who had orally given faculty to Vercellino to decide for the eventual withdraw, informing then Tirana.

In the meantime, in Greek camp, the course of the action, slowest both for the Italian resistance and for the sourness of the land, had induced the SAMO to introduce into the fight new forces. The 11th Division, collected to the west of Kastoria, was placed in state of alert;

16) DS Commando 9th Army, f. 810/op. dated 16.11.1940,

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

the 13th division passed to the dependencies of the III Corps. The objectives fixed by Tsolakoglou to the grand unit in first formation were precise and move closer to: Mt. Ivanit (15th division), Dardhe- Mt. Vrumbullake (9th) and Mt. Lofka (10th). On 17 November the Greek III Corps attacked again and violently. Once again the 15th Inf. Div. did not succeed to take either Mt. Ivanit nor Cangoni - Vranishta, the two sides of furrow of the Devoli. Instead the 9th Inf. Div., than day by day was gnawing the defense of Dardhë, picked the success occupying Mt. Propas and the line of crest of the Morova in its southern streth. for its part the 10th Inf. Div. succeeded to approach Mt. Lofka, is with the clear price of hard efforts.

It was clearly that without an increment of forces the wings of the III Corps would not have succeeded to be successful. From here a new advance participated: the 50th infantry was assigned to the 10th Inf. Div. and the 13th Inf. Div. received order to become part between 15th and 9th in order to advance directly on Zemblaku. The 18th was a day of disappointment for the Greeks. In part for the paltry results obtained by the three old divisions of the III Corps, the 13th Inf. Div., that to the two of night it had been put in motion under a torrential rain, received unexpectedly order to modify the direction of attack of the 23rd reinforced infantry in the first group, so that it reached Zemblaku do not give the plain, but along the direction Hogishti- crest of the Morova, that is from the height. The Buio and the bad weather aggravated the difficulty of connections, so that had a varying deleterious result for the framework of the regiment, whose units lost the contact between themselves, advancing slowly for long hours more or less untied, under the fire of the Italian artillery and without the support of their own. The Commanders of division and regiment could not or they did not know to take part with the due energy and effectiveness. Made it is that the news arrived at dark to Gen. Razis gave for deprived of hope the fate of those troops. Lend faith to the report that in the middle of the night the commander of the 23rd infantry personally made it, he ordered a withdraw to the Poloska zone, near the Devoli. As if that were not enough, the further orders were not received by all or badly understood, so that a atmosphere of panic was created that spread until the rears.

Tsolakoglou took part then personally. Come to acquaintance of the diffuse disorder in the 13th division and convinced visa vie by the news of a strongest Italian local counterattack - in how much not bear from the information supplied from the other sectors – he moved towards Smerdeke, where it appeared clear the causes and the responsibilities

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

for the events. Returning to Kastoria, he met towards with midnight Gen. Mutusis, commander of the artillery of the Army Corps, and ordered him to immediately assume the control of the division. Gen. Mutusis in twenty four hours he had the situation in hand⁽¹⁷⁾.

The inserting of 13th and 11th Divisions in the fight induced the SAMO to reorganize the forces in order better to guide the battle. While on the forehead of Leskoviku remained the II Corps, the sector of Korça was subdivided in two blocks: the III Corps remained with the 15th, 13th and 9th Divisions, and the 10th and the 11th they were placed under the orders of Gen. Kosmas, commander of the IV Army Corps, as "group of divisions K" (sketch n. 35). The reason of such denomination is from looking at itself in the fact that the tactical and logistic supports lacked in order to give life to true and proper Army Corps, indeed the supplying of the group of divisions K *was assured by the III Corps services. But other provisions* were in course to revive the counter-offensive. Between the main ones, the influx of the 17th Division (Gen. Basakidis) in the zone of Nestorion "*for expectably being employed on the left of the northern front defensively or offensively*", the concentration of the 5th Division (Gen. Papasterghiou) in the zone of Tolemaide, between Kozane and Florina, and the 16th Brigade towards Grevena, behind the II Corps.

While, at 13:00 of 17 November Vercellino had officially assumed the responsibility of the 9th Army in Pogradec. In the afternoon went to Korça for a long talk with Naschi. The outlined situation was worrisome, for the evident numerical superiority of the Greeks and for the persistence of the attacks to the sides of the Morova and now also in the intermediate zone, in which the our defended roadsteads, running along the eastern slopes of the solid mass, were in full subjection to the fire and the observation of the adversary. Among the other things, to south of Hoçishti there was quite a solution of continuity in the P.R. and increased the possibility that the Greeks reaching to Ersekë, they were turned against the right flank of the army through the Qarrit pass. In fact, towards midnight of the 16th, Col. Azzaro, commander of the detachment of Ersekë, had communicated to have rejected multiple Greek attacks with

17) Be worth the pain to place in evidence as, to have nothing to do with the take disciplinary measure and by the hard sentence of the divisional the military court - including two riflemen execute in the afternoon of the 9th at Hoçishti, as example --, the recall have in service in the 13th division official and soldier that to already have support during the campaign in Asia Minor constitute a fortuitous but important psychological factor to advantage of the Gen. Mutusis. It in fact, in that period, the biggest, he had been head of the operations section of that unit and his name was known favorably (S, M.E, Greek, op. cited, vol. III, page 57-58):

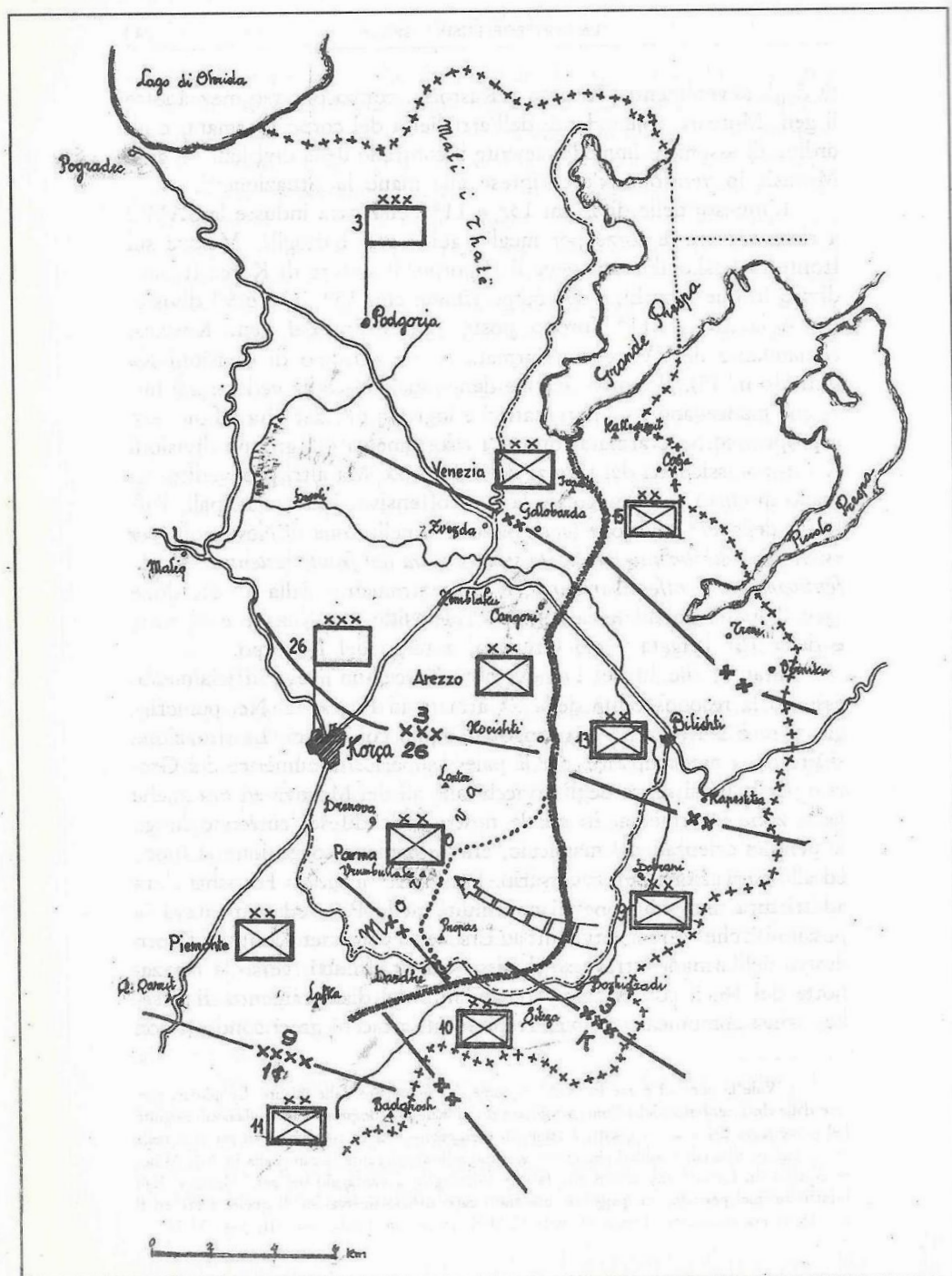
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 243

The situation in the Korçano 18 November

Schizzo n. 35

LA SITUAZIONE SUL KORCANO IL 18 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

preponderant forces, but to doubt of being able to continue a long the resistance; reason for which Gen. Nasci had ordered the evacuation as much as possible on the Qarrit pass. Also Gen. Arisio exposed the difficulties of the III Corps because of the exhausting of the *Venezia* and the *Arezzo*. It did not exist evidently, at the moment, other solution to the except to resist tenaciously on the place, not being feasible a regression with insufficient troops and, indeed not very, mobile under the enemy pressure. For the right flank of the Army and therefore of the XXVI Corps could used the *Verona* alp. Bn., only resource available at short notice. Vercellino briefed naturally Soddu, asked the immediate start to Pogradec of M Tank Bn. and the participation of aviation on close objects.

Soddu, in his directive n. 3⁽¹⁸⁾, asserted the purpose again to still hold put into effect the positions and the necessity that the forces of previewed arrival went to outline the rear P.D., behind which it was necessary moreover to predispose a minimum of logistic apparatus. The 9th Army it could "count on the *Tridentina*, the 11th Army with the *Modena* and on the alpine valley group. Each, moreover, with four machine-gun companies. He remarked that The Armed forces high command can itself renounce to create its own reserve in favor of the pressing requirements of the Armys, that it appears justified in the described circumstances, and represented the necessity (did not order) to employ the troops in course of affluence on the rear P.D., that it was evidently the better line of theoretical conduct, but to the practical action risked to sacrifice the troops in contact. He had not perhaps asserted, Vercellino, not to be able himself to uncouple because much too pressed? In order to save himself it was necessary the availability of some unit that with counterattacks to lightened the situation, or that the enemy, for defect of feeding or error of command, interrupted the action. In the first case the 9th Army it would have been forced to employ the first units that at least arrived. In as far as the second hypothesis, nothing justified an optimism of the sort. If then the Greeks had not only maintained the pressure but intensified the efforts, then all the one which had arrived from the rears he would be fatally ended in the furnace. This last eventuality was that one that took place.

In the night on the 18th the first patrols of the 9th Division exceeded the ridge of the Morova in the zone of Mt. Vrumbullakë and began to come down towards Drenova, in the basin of Korça. The defection

18) DSCSFAA, f. 319/op. dated 18.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of an unit of Albanian carabinieri to the command of a non-commissioned officer it had allowed with the Greeks to get hold of the muleteer who give the watershed adduce to Drenova-Borije and therefore to Korça. Showing therefore also the eventuality of a breach to the center of the sector, of the audacious measure achieved the urgency of one: to dismantle the most dangerous feature, but less immediately attachable, to advantage of another in which the offense was outlined more immanent. The XXVI Corps received therefore order to move one of the two battalions of the 4th bersaglieres to the Qarrit pass in order to constitute a obstruction to east of Korça, joined to a Bn. of the bersaglieres. The *Verona* Bn. had to locate laterally to it and to counterattack on the flank the Greek penetration. Vercellino was resolute:

"I confirm much of what I have communicated orally yesterday; the situation and the conditions of the troop do not allow to maneuver in withdraw. Therefore I order to remain on the place, counting on the automaticity of the fire from part of the defender grabbed hold of to a land that he knows exactly"⁽¹⁹⁾.

With respect to P.D. rear, which also it had to be in some way occupied, attended and the hope that an improvement of the circumstances to allow the retrograde move, he was oriented to send the most tried troops, to the twofold scope to avoid a harmful negative influence on the spirit of the reinforcing units - that, as by now it was known, just completed being sent to Albania, in a very difficult atmosphere, with a remarkable psychological repercussion - and to decidedly reconstitute normal organic ties in unit under way for the complete change of the situation after the departure for a falsely charmed offensive. This was probably the worrisome factor. The same of the 18th, to late evening, Vercellino sent the head of the information office of the army to Tirana, with a personal letter:

"Beloved Soddu,
the situation is much more serious especially for the moral state of the troops, from many days online. I do not have the possibility to winnow the insufficient information on the enemy and it makes a precise convincement on his ability to puts into effect an offensive.

Would seem convenient to be useful for a day of lesser pressure in order to assume the noted more economic rear alignment. Therefore I have prepared the attached order that I reserve myself to emanate at the opportune moment in case of absolute necessity.

19) OS Commando 9th Army, f. 833/Op. Dated 18.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

A effective air support will serve to favor the eventual maneuver of withdraw, however, since for now, a greater air support, from all the employee commands strongly wished and demanded of me, it could remove the disgraceful necessity of and painful provision of withdrawn (...)⁽²⁰⁾.

That the circumstances were critical were emerged without a shadow of doubt in the afternoon to the crossroad of Podgoria, on the Korça – Pogradec roadway. Here, to relationship, the two commanders of army corps had exposed and commented the events: coming down from the Morova the enemy already had arrived to shooting of automatic arms from the eastern suburbs of Korça and threatened to flow into the plain, the army dividend in two; at the narrows of Golloborda the *Venezia* by now resisted with difficulty and *one* breach in those stretch of the front would have provoked the encirclement of the entire Army; from Ersekë towards Qarrit pass he was afraid the identical misfortune in inverse direction. But there was of the other. The intermingling of the units (sketch n. 36), the insufficiency of the organization, the losses in artilleries and automatic arms suffered until then, the force of collision of the adversary, more numerous and better armed, made to think next the disarticulation of the defense. For more flowing little by little of units transferred in aircraft, and consequently deprived of materials and of baggage train, he could not modify the state of the things. Only the arrival within short terms of time of an organic division could have concurred to conserve integrity of the front.

Vercellino said frankly that not there was from being deceived on this arrival and therefore, taking advantage himself of the faculty conferred by the Comandante Superiore, taking the decision to make to withdraw the army. The larger issue to resolve preliminarily was but always that one of the disengaging. To such aim he ordered that the day after (19 November) all the troops in affluence be employed in energetic actions of counterattack in various features of the sector, in order to create the possibility of the breach of the contact without the risk of the following from part of the Greeks. He established moreover the beginning of the operation for the successive night on the 20th. In the late evening a good note came: the provision to strip the defenses of the Qarrit pass partially in order to face and to reject the penetration through the Morova had been demonstrated successful, since the Greeks had yielded withdrawing at once towards the crest of the solid mass*. In any case the fundamental gravity of the moment was not changed evidently, and the III/225th infantry of the *Taro* with the 508th

20) DSCSFAA, letter dated 18.11.1940, hours 22:00.

* massiccio

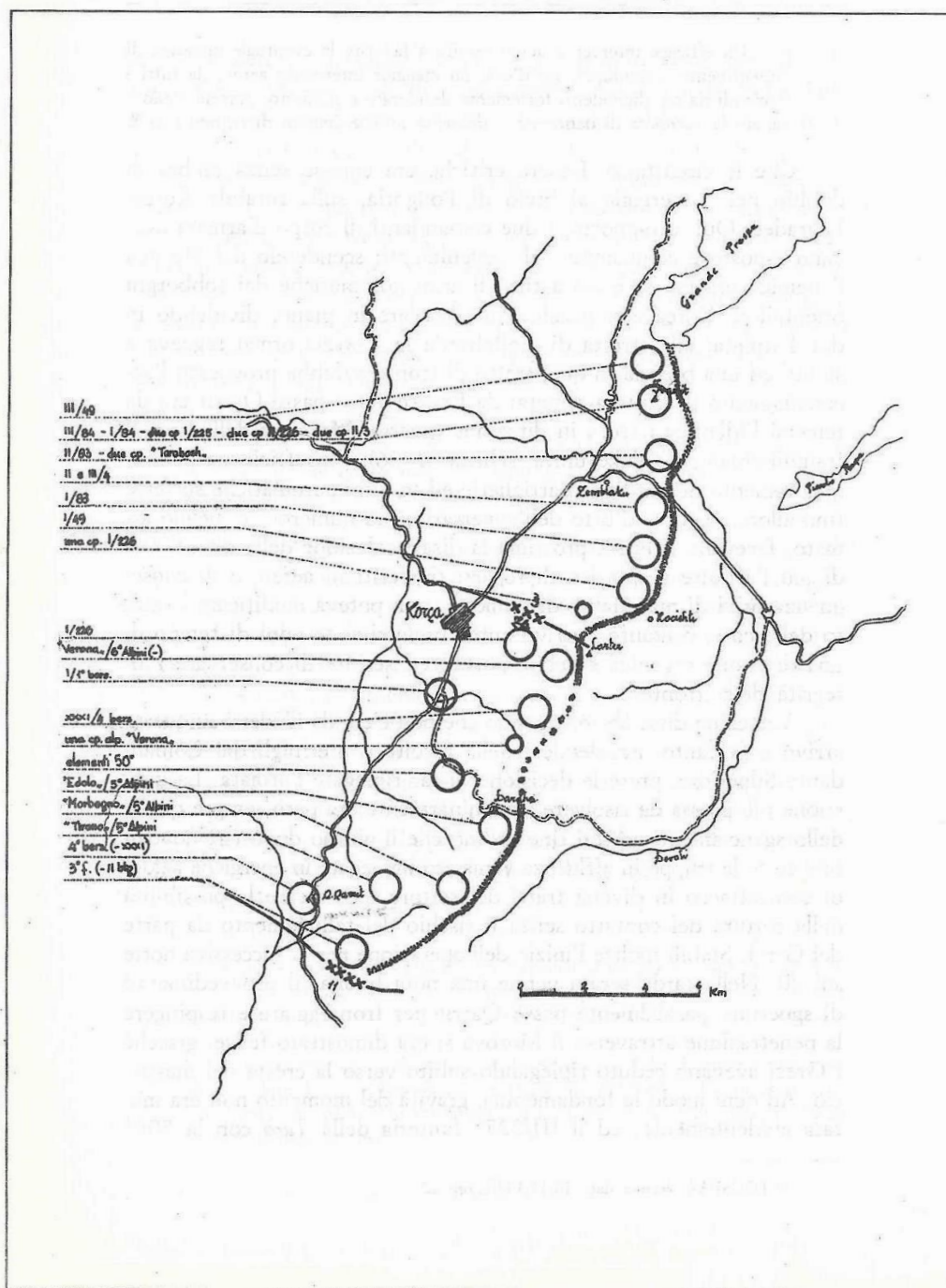
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 247

The intermingling with the units in the 9th Army (19 November)

Schizzo n. 36

IL FRAMMISCHIAMENTO DEI REPARTI SULLA 9^a ARMATA (MATTINO 19 NOVEMBRE)



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

machine-gun co. immediately were sent to Pllaçës saddleback, to east of Pogradec, with the task to arrest eventual enemy infiltrations and of rigorously forbid the passage to the zone of the rear of soldiers no matter how stragglers⁽²¹⁾.

Soddu approved of the predispositions assumed from the two Army commanders - also Geloso found in one situation similar to that one of the 9th Army - and said in a short white paper to both⁽²²⁾: *"I am convinced that we are in the moment of crisis for us and for the Greeks; this you will be able to know instinctively during the day today"* you wrote then to Vercellino. In truth the crisis was all for us, even if from the Greek side was a pause. Two new disadvantages came to complete the picture. The losses of wounded or died senior officers were not replaceable** for non availability*** of equal degree in permanent service. As an example, 18 had fallen in the front line like Col. Zacco, commander of the 84th infantry of the *Venezia*, and in order to replace him temporary it had been necessary to entrust the regiment to the commander of 225th infantry *Arezzo*. The problem of the artillery continued to represent the point of greater weakness. Many field guns had to be replaced, but supplies of materials did not exist. The only group of 105/28 was in no more conditions than to make fire for the lack glycerin and breakdowns to the stuffing box. The III Corps had not still received the own artillery.

The Greeks, instead, if to north had been stopped from the resistance met, in the sectors of the 13th and 9th Division continued to realize small progresses⁽²³⁾. Hoçishti and Dardhë fell the 19th increasing the passage in the P.R., through which the elements in first group could occupy Mt. Larter, summit of the Morova, and a force of the *Arezzo* - for lack of reserves - to abandon Bebani and Vranishta,

21) The fire of the Greek artilleries on Korça had negative repercussions, especially on the services units.

22) DSCSFAA, f. 611/op. dated 19.11.1940, confirmed by tele. 627/op. dated 19.11.1940: *"From this moment resistance on positions stop Confirm putting into effect has the goal to concur on line alignment on the chosen defended line & to concur evacuation artilleries & means to faculties the order of withdraw or when you think indispensable stop Criterion to follow for employment new affluent forces is that one to assure outline of second line stop"*.

23) At 23:00 of the 18th Nasci signaled: *"n. 968 stop 23:00 hours stop repeated attacks of the enemy in Dardhë zone - hill 1828 - Lofka have been rejected by means of fire actions and counterassault stop enemy Infiltrations Drenova which radio n. 963 have caught up hill 1431 stop continuous enemy pressure on our troops on all sectors stop arrived entire Verona battalion stop"*, and the following morning: *"n. 969 stop 08:00 hours stop emphasized enemy pressure in direction Mt. Borja & Boboshtica stop slow enemy progression tenaciously contrasted but continues stop remaining front situation unchanged stop"*.

* premistoppa

** colmabili

*** indisponibilità

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

that constituted a untenable salient by now. The line of resistance was therefore back on the ridge with the consequent weakening of the obstruction of Cangoni.

The 19th Soddu sent to the 9th Army the deputy chief with the G.S., Colonel Cigliana, and the head information office, Col. Catcies, in order to collect news and impressions. The report was clear and precise. The arrival of the first fresh troops, even if in incomplete order, and above all their effective contribution in the battle in course had strengthened the confidence of being able to face the circumstances with a minimum of more reinforcements. The eventuality of a withdraw, also being introduced indicative credits the commanders of Army Corps, had not constituted object of precise dispositions. Undoubtedly the paper of the withdraw could not be played to the thoughtless. For the physical and moral conditions of the tried units mainly (divisions *Parma*, *Venezia* and *Piemonte*), for the presence in Korça of numerous organizations and not combatant units (district, territorial units, services, working units, etc.) let alone of skidding*, for the lack of fresh elements and artilleries in order protect from the rear P.D. the withdraw and finally for the absence of easy ways of communication, a withdraw maneuver, for how much studied good and coordinate, could easy change into a very harmful a chaotic movement and disordering for all the Italian alignment in Albania. For these considerations the commander of the army preferred to continue with succeeding the work of collision as long as possible, rather than to run the serious danger of a withdrawn without guarantee of a sufficiently solid position to the rear. Concrete elements did not exist that gave confidence for the resolution of the solution based on the resistance in place; but the greater firmness demonstrated from some units online, the initiative taken from others of counterassault - carried out already with success -, the greater order of the rears, regulating to carry out itself of the movements and the transports into the Korçano, constituted a favorable index.

Then it is undeniable that the Greeks, after the occupation not of the all hoped for good part of the ridge of the Morova and, in particular way, of the furrow of Dardhë, had seen to rise their moral strongly, however the force of penetration of the attack proportionate to desire to get hold quickly of Korça. The lacked use of easy successes, the insufficient resistance to our dynamic reactions, the worry not to expose their artilleries too much, was to demonstrate that the feeding of their efforts met remarkable difficulties (in no point the attacks was being

*sbandati

** intenibile

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

lead with advanced forces to the two battalions in the first group). The Greeks had continued with succeeding the infiltration tactics through the wide voids of our P.D., finding valid allied in the worry, perhaps excessive, of the flanks from part of our units and, in some case, minor the reactivity of exhausted units materially and morally.

4. THE WITHDRAW OF THE 9TH ARMY.

The evening of the 20th Soddu determined of giving the way to the withdraw and in such sense sent the order to the 9th Army. However, when the following morning he went to Pogradec, Vercellino represented that the message, deciphered at 03:00, not holding account of counterattacks already previewed for the day and requested to postpone the operation for twenty-four hours, in order to give greater breath to the maneuver. Received the assent of the Comandante Superiore, in his presence Vercellino delivered to the two Corps Commanders the executive order. New P.D. had been corrected regarding the first indication in order to eliminate the wide come back Mt. Lenijës - Bregu the Math - Mt. Mietës. It ran on the line of the saddleback of Pllacës - Guri Regjanit - Mt. Valamare - Mt. Lenijës - Çuka and Bofnjes - Velushes (sketch n. 37). At the end of the maneuver the device previewed the III Corps with the divisions *Piemonte* and *Arezzo*, as well as the 1st and 4th bersaglieres; XXVI the body with the divisions *Parma* and *Tridentina*; in Army reserve the *Venezia* division, as soon as possible.

At dark he began the abandonment of the P.D. Is the regression of the bulk is the breach of the contact were carried out without that they were perceived from the enemy. At dawn of the 22nd last units of the 4th Bersaglieres, already lined up at the Qarrit pass, passed for Korça, after that the commander of the engineers of the XXVI Corps blew up abandoned ammunitions. A company of, light tanks was withheld until 09:00 in the flat in order to cover the withdraw of eventually latecomer nuclei, then even it withdrew. The uncoupling was successful, simply hindered from fire actions of the Greek artillery and from some participation of Greek aviation with bombing and strafing, but without many damages.

The inevitability of the maneuver had not been understood in Rome, in spite of the amplitude of the comparisons supplied.

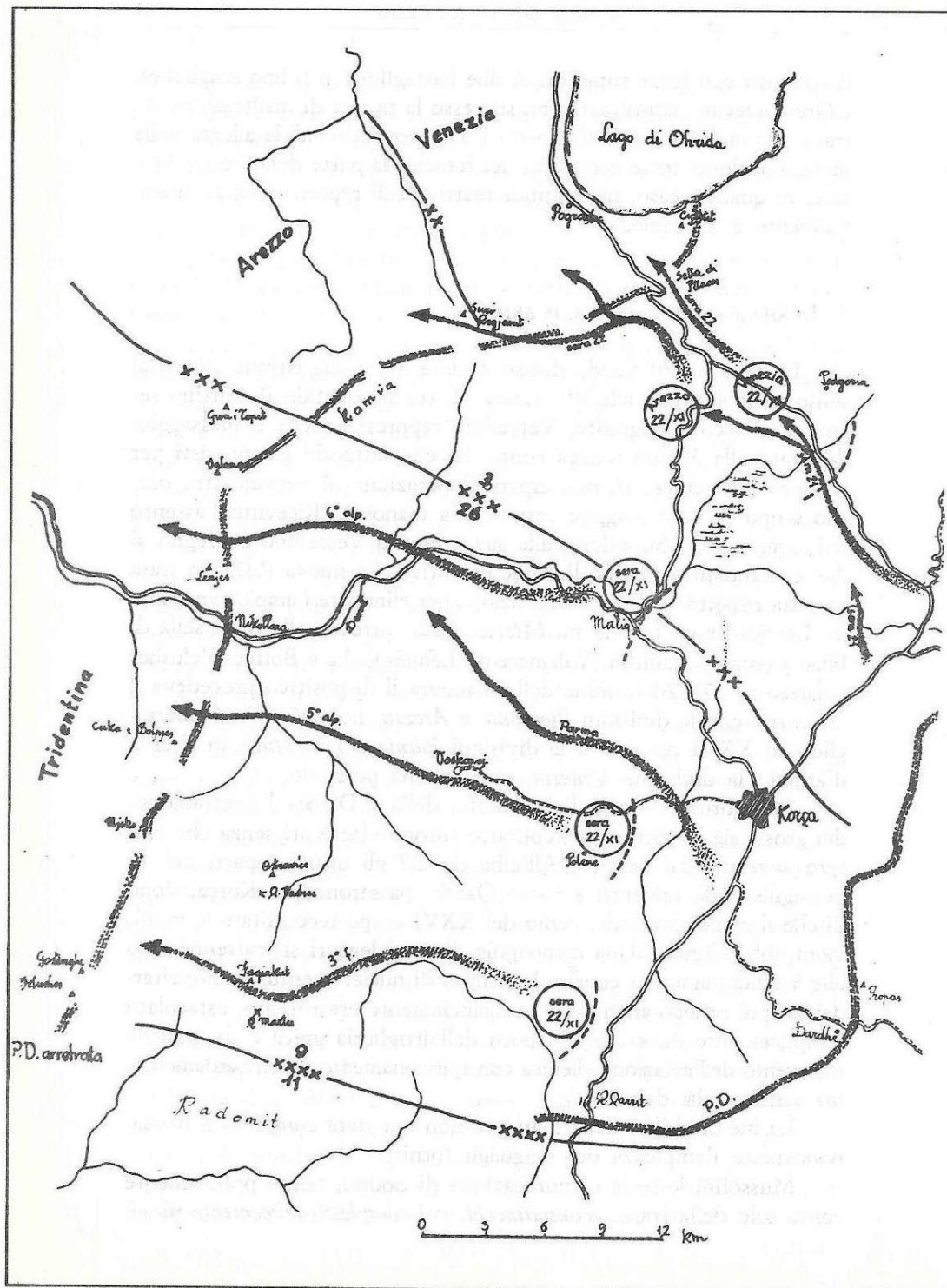
Mussolini read the communication of Soddu, practically held account only of the phrase: "*the counterattacks, on the whole happily resolved,*

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 252

The withdraw with the troops with the 9th Army (21-23 November)

IL RIPIEGAMENTO DELLA TRUPPA DELLA 9^a ARMATA (21-23 NOVEMBRE)



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

that they stretch to create the more favorable atmosphere to the development of the withdraw maneuver ", and hurried to telegraph:

"I have seen your report on today's situation 21st 07:00 hours *stop* To examine in basis at daily data today & the results of your counterattack is not opportune to delay movement 9th Army that you have predisposed of which sure you have estimated the consequences of military order and to the damages our moral *stop* Report immediately to me *stop*"⁽²⁴⁾.

For Mussolini it was simply dealing with to remain in place until possible or to withdraw of the forces, and only in this eventuality, but the issue was different. In the responsible commanders doubts did not exist on the necessity of withdraw: the problem was of the moment. Until it was not resolutions to provoke the favorable conditions for the disengagement had to remain on the Morova - Grammos, but not just the circumstances had supplied a positive minimum of indication were necessary to retreat. Naturally the immediate retort from Tirana was:

"The military situation does not allow further delay of regression *stop* movement is in course from today"⁽²⁵⁾.

The next day Soddu, reporting on the events, returned to the subject:

"(...) In relation to the invitation received yesterday evening from the Head of the Government to examine the possibility to delay the withdraw of the 9th army, I have had to answer that to the state of fact it was not possible. Of other part the determination to assume the line more rearward had been imposed on me from the total results of the battle and above all from the ascertainment made that the rhythm of reinforcements that it was possible to send online, in relation to the rhythm of arrivals from Italy, had been to the maximum of a battalion to the day, moreover incomplete battalion, without draft animals and means and that in an exceptionally favorable period to the ends of the aerial transports, that unfortunately from yesterday it was stopped.

The contribution of these Bns. could not rationally neither then be taken advantage of and it was resolved in an employment to bit by bit, that it only concurred to slow down the enemy effort but not to arrest its maneuver of breach on Drenava - Korça that fatally progressed without that the 9th Army had a also small reserve in order to re-establish the situation, while the fatigue of the troops in place did not concur a resumption.

I judge that with the situation in action I did not have further delay to make the decision. In the previous days the grip of opposing pressure would have totally compromise nearly the development of the maneuver transforming it

24) DSCS, tele 157253/41-2-9 dated 21.11.1940, hours 19,15.

25 DSCSFAA, tele 854/op. dated 21.11.1940, hours 23.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

in route; still remaining in place, without to modify the outcome of the battle, would have rendered impossible a successive reconstitution of the army (...) "⁽²⁶⁾.

In the morning of the 23rd the bulk of the 9th Army had already carried out the second jolt, reaching the rear D.P.. Also the *Tridentina*, by now nearly all re-united, already had been strongly engaged. On the 23rd Gen. Santovito, commander of the division, wrote to the Commander of the XXVI C A.:

"(...) the companies of the *Vestone* that have already suffered from the enemy attacks are reduced nearly without machine-guns and machine gunners. Also the ammunitions lacks, especially the hand grenades. Almost totally lack cloth awnings, blankets, capes, mess tins and reserve provisions. The conditions of the *Verona* and the *Vicenza* group instead are much better, except for ammunition and rations. I think that in analogous conditions of the *Vestone* Bn. are found of the 5th alpine (...) "⁽²⁷⁾.

Exceeded the phase of tactical crisis of the separation, it remained to face the logistics. To such scope Vercellino, Ranza and Nasci gathered - present also Pricolo coming in flight from Rome - in order to establish the modalities of supply for the three columns of the XXVI Corps: held account of the strongest difficulties of movement, the constitution of three points of supply on which was decided airs-launch ammunitions, provisions and sanitary material the day after.

The resistance found on the Morova - Grammos line and the violence of the local reactions had induced the Greeks to desist momentarily from the effort, perhaps fearing a stronger counterattack. The 15th division were concerned to the *active defense*; the 13th had been taken care of the antitank defense in valley of the Devoli, considered much probable a irruption of Italian tanks, and the possession "*to cost of every sacrifice of the threshold of Kapestica against eventual enemy attacks of whichever nature*"⁽²⁸⁾; the 9th had to be limited to the full control of the part of Morova already conquered. The offensive role was up to the K group of divisions, than, it proceeded to astride of the Nikolitse - Kamenica director, is worth to say from the northern Grammos towards the north - west in order to destroy the right shoulder of the Italian 9th Army. The directives of Gen. Pitsikas had been however cautious: after the fall of Morova, the generals Tsolakoglou and Kosmas had "*to be arrested without to carry itself with*

26) DSCSFAA, f. 868/op. dated 22.11.1940.

27) DS D.alp Commando. *Tridentina*, f. 1047/op. dated 23.11.1940.

28) Greek S.M.E., op. cit., vol. III, page 62.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the mass of their forces in basin of Koritsa and an eventual advance would have had place only as a result of his [Pitsikas] order" (29).

"Consequently, the operations order of Gen. Kosmas indicated as objective for the 11th Inf. Div. the positions of Butkë - Kozel and for the 10th Inf. Div. (of which Gen. Dromazos had assumed the command) Mt. Sepotista, to the west of Dardhë (sketch n. 38). To the objectives reached each one would have endured pushed light reconnaissance until to the Ersekë - Korça road.

The attack, previewed for the morning of the 21st, was set back to 13:00 because of intensities of the fog. After preparation of artillery of an hour, the 10th Inf. Div. (30th, 50th and 68th infantry with the VII and XI reconnaissance group) left the lines of departure, but it could proceed little and slowly, however towards evening it occupied Mt. Lofka. The 11th, for its part, reached Butkë and Kozel. In the afternoon, in the meantime, two notes had arrived. The first from the High Command who reported a Yugoslavian information source, according to which in morning had been seen a column of one score of kilometers in march from Korça towards Pogradec. Second, the analogous one, it had been supplied from the Yugoslavian garrison of Saint Naum, on the border, to the Commander of the Greek III Corps. If up to now the Greek tactical behavior could find some explanation in the difficulty to develop the offensive and in the wear and tear of the troops, now the precaution appears less justifiable: *"The III Army Corps and to the K divisions group transmitted such news to the employee units and recommended to intensify the vigilance so that the unhooking of the Italians (...). At dawn of 22 November, assessed, was watched to the maximum that the enemy had interrupted the contact end from the night, all the units of the III Corps were pushed forward (...)"*⁽³⁰⁾. Little by little. They were occupied without fuss Cangoni, Golloborda, and Ivanit, the northern part of the Morova. At 17:45 a battalion of the 9th Division entered Korça. The new orders of the III Corps regarded the order to confer to the dispositions. The 15th Inf. Div. must to arrange itself securely on the Ivanit and the northwest slopes of the Morova, so as to assure the defense of the narrows of the Devoli to the height of Zvezde; the 9th Inf. Div., to hold the western slope of the Morova; the 13th Inf. Div. would have been limited to concentrate themselves and to reorder themselves in the zone of Vranishta.

The K divisions group, occupied Qarrit pass, took care even

29) Ibid, page. 63.

30) Ibid, page. 66-67

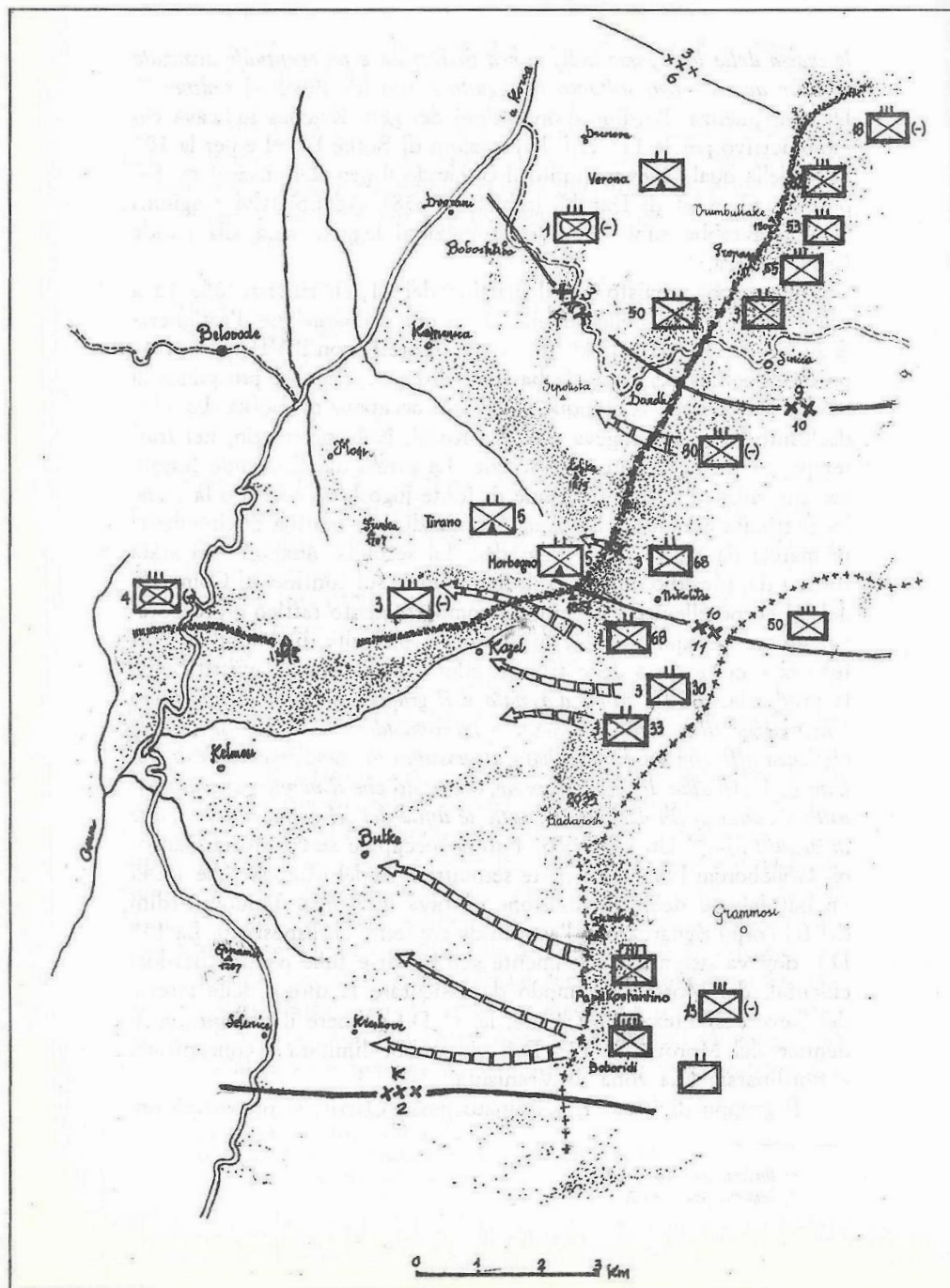
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 256

The Greek attack to the southern flank of the 9th Army (19-21 November)

Schizzo n. 38

L'ATTACCO GRECO AL FIANCO MERIDIONALE DELLA 9^a ARMATA (19-21 NOVEMBRE)



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

to in sure possession of the positions reached. On the entire front the cavalry units were pushed in ahead reaching Podgoria, to north of lake Maliq, and first mountain layers some to the south without to re-establish the contact with the Italians. Thus the situation on the evening of the 23rd. The Greek official report commented:

"(...) the Italian Command timely collected the bulk of its forces in the plateau of Koritsa and he moved it under protection of strong rearguards towards the north, towards Lin. Moreover its units in contact succeeded to withdraw unnoticed in the night from the 21 to 22 November; therefore the Greek units in first formation lost the occasion to take advantage of their success"⁽³¹⁾.

While still the units of the 9th Army were arranging on the line Pogradec-Valamare- Velushes, two new elements of perturbation aggravated the Italian situation. In the first hours of the 24th reached Elbasan, new headquarters of the Commander of army⁽³²⁾, an alarming message from Geloso:

"Today on the front of the VIII C A. the division Bari has yielded strongly deep enemy attack withdrawing Vojussa valley & leaving empty between Q. Martes & Frasheri *point* Commander VIII C A. is starting the few units available in order to adorn threatened valley Osum *point* Requests at Comando Superiore to start trucked units Cerevode *point* for norm at Q. Martes & Q. Calibarit has been from yesterday under way a alpine company each that is still not know if arrives *point* Division Bari still efficient does not deprive consistency without automatic arms & with insufficient artillery not more employable for a long time *point*"⁽³³⁾.

As if that it were not enough, the recognitions more detailed made from the Commanders on the place reported unanimously that new P.D., in order strongly that it was, turned out excessive extended (approximately 60 kilometers online of air and approximately 150 on the land) in connection with the entity and qualities of the forces available.

Vercellino began at once with ordering the movement forward to the welding point with the 11th Army, from Mt. Velushes to Q. Martes. The completion of the *Taro*, in course of influx, would have had to improve the perspectives for the III Corps, but, to confirm as the hesitations of the commander of the army to order the withdraw were justified, a letter can be thought convincing from Nasci with respect to the state of efficiency of the XXVI Corps, letter that was concluded

31) Ibid, page 71.

32) The 26th will arrive from Italy an other group of the Army Headquarter, that will be completed 2 December.

33) DS Commander 11th Army, tele. 026501/op. dated 24.11.1940, hours 04:30.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

with the demand for alpine, only in a position to striking with it turns out positive to 2000 meters of altitude, in spite of the losses, although the rigors of the climate, although the enemy and in spite of painful conditions in which reached the front.

Soddu did not surely know all that, and tried to often feel "the pulse" of the troops. To the demand for news that 27 November he made Vercellino, these answered tracing a serene and objective picture under the profile of the operating possibilities (sketch n. 39).

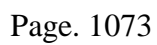
On the left, where the tracing of the P.R. had been chosen also in order to conserve a possibility of offensive outlet, the slow flow of the 208th infantry and the Greek attacks already began rendered the northern part of the alignment more and more delicate. On 20 kilometers approximately of front, in a land everywhere practicable, 6,000 men and 54 guns found themselves. A breakthrough in those drawn would have turned the left of the device, therefore the III Corps had been in charge to garrison endured a folding (Guri Regjanit - Mt. Kalaze). Moreover the prompt availability of *Taro* and Tank M Bn., before the Greek new offensive, would have concurred a counterattack estimate to throw the enemy towards the swamp of the Maliq.

The right wing aroused worry in two points: between Çuka and Bofnjes and Q. Martes, for the smallness of the unit of the *Piemonte*, and astride of the furrow of the Devoli. As far as the *Parma*, it was not more considering itself employable if not after a complete rearrangement.

The Comandante Superiore with the "Directive n. 4" accepted and confirmed the modification proposals approximately the course of the P.R., defining sectors and areas of competence and suggesting indications, much truer than own directives, on the line of conduct to hold. But not succeeding to deliver up a reserve, seeing that the Army was gasping - each trying to resolve to the better their own problems - were not in condition for imposing his strategic will. He observed but that the first situation sent on the new alignment indicated repeating itself of the intermingling of battalions, already found on the front of Korça and fundamental cause of weakness of that device. Also becoming perfectly calculation of the causes that could have run to that disadvantage, he sped up the adoption of the movements being necessary to give again life to the divisional organisms in their organic and moral units⁽³⁴⁾. But the serious disadvantage was not born in the sphere of the armies.

34) DSCSFAA, f. 1181/op. dated 27.11.1940.

LO SCHIERAMENTO DELLA 9ª ARMATA IL 25 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Just, to mid November, carrying out itself of the operations was outlined in favorable light, the Greek High Command placed the question mark of the continuation to give to the operations, and above all of where to carry the gravitation of the effort. The Florina – Korça - Elbasan director, as already said previously, was served by a single roadway, than skirted all the right of the operating field and would have met at once the great massive in the imminent winter period. The director Gianina- Valona instead offered better perspectives decidedly. And it existed, moreover, another consideration that he induced to prefer the search of one solution in the south-western field: the possibilities of feeding of the troops. The refueling of the SAMO had place for railroad until to the stations of Florina, Aminteo and Kalabaka, to then truck convoys until to the front (for the Pindo was still necessary for an feature to truck baggage train). Those of the field Epirus instead were transported via sea to Preveza and from here with convoys to destination. Since the availability of means very left to wish for the limited total entity, for the heterogeneity of the motor vehicles and for their state of efficiency, an offensive would have found a more and more serious obstacle in the field of the transports; nagging problem for the Greek government who repeatedly had sped up aids in matter from the British ally. The only solution gradually consisted therefore in proceeding towards Valona occupying the ports. The first one was that one of Santi Quaranta, that could have addressed the current of the supplying and evacuations on the roadway S. Quaranta - Delvino - Jerguçat, much short distance of the making route head to Preveza. Held account of this element, the established design of maneuver 24 November from the Greek High Command was based on two points. First, to make sure the free availability of the roadway Korça - Leskoviku and Kakavia- Santi Quaranta, catching up and possibly occupying massive of Mali i Gjer (west of Argirocastro), Nemerçke (between Dhrinos and Vojussa) and of Mali Kokoika (to the north of Premeti, beyond Vojussa). According to, to constitute a sturdy hinge on the extreme right and to advance decidedly with the left, while the center would have followed and facilitated the movement, connecting the two wings⁽³⁵⁾.

The directives derived for the G.U. on the whole. The SAMO had to defend at all costs the plateau of Korça and, at the same time, to engage to the maximum the adversary for obstructing spillage of forces

35) Greek S.M.E., op. cit., vol. III, page 73-74.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

into the other field. Such task had to be aggressively acquitted astride of the ways of penetration of Pogradec, of the Devoli and of the head of the tributary of the left, initially used as roadway. The II Corps had to advance along the Premeti - Berat director, coming down the valley of the Vojussa and the Osum, and to assure the connection with contiguous sectors⁽³⁶⁾; while the I Corps would have proceeded along the director Kalibaki – Argirocastro - Tepeleni - Valona, gravitating with the forces on the left. In strategic reserve the 5th and 13th Inf. Div. remained and the 16th brigade in the western Macedonian and 4th the Inf. Div. in the Epirus.

To notice that directives of Papagos did not fix neither an objective nor a progression cadence. The only firm point was the concept to realize just favor the fitness for traffic of the roads of Santi Quaranta - Jerguçat and of Ersekë - Leskoviku. According to the thought of the High Command, the strategic objective "*would be depended from the term of time that the winter would have placed for the substantial suspension of the operations. The situation of the enemy and the moral of the Greek troops authorized many hopes, in case the [subordinate] Commands were managing to take advantage of the time to their disposition*"⁽³⁷⁾. If such it was the conviction, and effectively the Italian Armies had badly departed and the enthusiasm of the Greeks to the stars, because to abstain from a determined maneuver of breach? Of other part, in the exploitation of the success it can be opportune or necessary to loosen the reins of the subordinates, - but in a battle to set up freedom of initiative to the subordinate units does not appear convincing leaving. And right, however, to admit perhaps that this line of conduct, even if given up in practical to a decisive result, put Soddu more in difficulty than as much as would not have made an organic plan.

Once again the contrast of views between the commanders of the SAMO and the III Corps emerged. Pitsikas was worried about the fatigue of the units and clearly inclined a rest in order to reorder the device. He previewed a first time, to beginning 25 November (Korça had been occupied the 22nd), for the completion of the consolidation on the Ivanit - Morova positions and of Qarrit pass; according to time in order to block the narrows between the lake of Ohrida and the Maliq; a third time in order to reach Pogradec and the narrows of Tresova sul Devoli. To similar set against the slowness the engagement

36) The II Corps still was framed in the SAMO, but the High Command more than once said specific orders directly to one or the other C.A.

37) Greek S.M.E., op. cit., vol. III, page 74.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

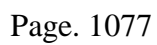
and the initiative of Gen. Tsolakoglou that, on the own responsibility, in put motion the four reconnaissance groups of which he arranged, making to follow them to short distance from the vanguards of the 9th and 13th divisions (the 15th remained on the defense at the threshold of Golloborda).

The contact had taken place the 26th in the sector of the Italian III Corps. The 13th division invested the defense of Pogradec (sketch n. 40), but without appreciable results until to the 29th(38), Instead the 9th division, that operated against the Kamia and were found in correspondence of the sector limit between the *Arezzo* and *Venezia*, had greater success. The 28th a Greek grouping succeeded to conquer, after repeated efforts, Bregu Bari Kuqit and Guri Kamias, constituent projection of the position more meaningful than all the sector: the complex mountainous of the Kamia. The loss of such complex would have offered the possibility to hit from the height the right flank of an intending defender to maintain between the lake of Ohrida and the watershed between the lake and Skumbini. For converged, it opened to the adversary the multiple lines of penetration adducing to the confluence of the properly said Skumbini with the Skumbini di Denica. In the particular, the fall of projection of the Bregu Bari Kuqit and Guri Kamias gave to the Greeks the control of the only mule track of supply for the right of the *Arezzo*, to part along turn on uncomfortable paths. Neither was it possible to air drop supply container as the resource of parachute lacked. The launch with bags had already demonstrated the uselessness of the attempt, for the damages received in the collision to the ground of the box-shielded material and ammunitions. After all, since the line was lacking in value, where they had not been conserved the solid mass* cited and possibly its projection, and since the issue of the supplying was already more than heavy, was necessary in contemporaneusness of times to withdraw the III Corps extreme left of and to try to reconquer with a counterattack Bregu Kuqit Bari.

While Arisio predisposed the withdraw of the *Venezia* for the night on the 30th, Vercellino wrote to Soddu:

38) The 13th Inf. Div., entrusted 18 November to Gen. Mutusis, still had not reached a satisfactory tone because of the devoid action of command of the coming from senior cadres from the reserve. Gen. Mutusis, able and energetic, tried to place shelter, but evidently the issue was complex. However in a few weeks he raised from the assignment the commander of the artillery, all the regiment commanders, six commanders of battalion of nine and two artillery battalion commanders of artillery. The commander of 23rd the infantry, condemned by martial court for the facts of 18 November, killed the morning of the Natale (Greek S.M.E., op. cit., vol. III, pag. 84). The episode is brought back to demonstration that the same causes - first among all some deficiencies of organization, and however not necessarily not always attributable to the individual - had in the two live the same effects. From Italian part but it marked a strongest antidote: the moral.

*massiccio



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"(...) Prego introduces me to what is the understandings of Armed forces high command F.A.A. in the case that the enemy effort in direction of the Skumbini succeeded to have reason of the defense and carried to the conquest of Guri Regjanit. In fact, whichever regression of the army imports a widening of the front and a door to operate in a more and more practicable land.

Detention, moreover, the northern hinge of the Ostravica, and wanting to maintain the left on the Yugoslavian border in order to prevent the encircling from east, is obvious that the front would come to grow boundless, more and more reducing puts into effect the most insufficient density of the alignment.

I have given compulsory dispositions to the dependent C.A. because the troop, grabbed hold of to the land, resists tenaciously on the place but I consider it a must of the commander to signal the possibility of remarkable infiltrations on a entire front in which they are entrusted drawn patrols, while do not exist any reinforcements nor any sector reserves for counter maneuver (...) ⁽³⁹⁾.

The 30th the Greek 9th division delivered to a most violent attack supported from a small preparation of artilleries and medium-caliber gun in the feature Bregu Kemerit-Guri Regjanit, under a strongly snow storm and with a the most dense fog. The advance companies were carried until the slopes of the great heights, then they had to be withdrawn rejected from the intense and effective of the defense fire. At the same time, a new effort operated from the 13th Inf. Div. from Beragozhda provoked the fall (previewed) of hill 1244, that it dominated from south all the basin of Pogradec and rendered the definitive abandonment of the positions to east of the city unavoidable.

In the afternoon Greek patrols, stated the regression of the *Venezia*, they moved on Starova and Remeni.

To better plug the leak that was being opened in the zone of Pogradec, the 9th Army had to preoccupy the right wing, come to contact with the exploring units of the K divisions group. The columns of the *Tridentina* had caught up the P.D. the 25th, and for some day they were occupied in the assumption of the new alignment and in the systemizing of the land, let alone in rejecting the patrols of ' Greek cavalry and infantry. But lacked news of the 3rd infantry, since, because of the torments it that raged at the head of the Tomorreces, the connections did not work and in it had to await some information through the chain of the quickly organized correspondence positions. In the night of 1 December the 11th Army communicated that the alpine company of *Val Felta*, detached from the VII Corps at Q. Martes, had been attacked in forces during the torments and forced to withdraw on Mt. Faqiakuqit, to the extreme south of the Ostravice.

39) DSCSFAA, f. 1194 segr. dated 29.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

They opened therefore a breach between the two armies. Of other part there was not from making some confidence on the troops line up of the *Piemonte* between Çuka and Bofnjes and Q. Martes, be a matter themselves of exhausted unit and not in a position to resist the climatologic conditions of the zone, the 5th alpine could absolutely extend its right some. The only availability was represented from a tactical group of formation to constitute with the more valid elements of the *Parma*; with it was believed to block the origins from the high valleys of the Tomorreces, in case of penetrations.

On 30 November, therefore, the situation of the army (sketch n. 41) was very delicate, especially in the field of the 3rd infantry, for the solution of continuity to Q. Martes. But it is necessary here to find that the poor devils and painful conditions in which many, too many, units they fought were provoking a psychosis, for which strong Greek patrols particularly aggressive, here and here making mass against an isolated and exhausted unit, or appearing on the credit side unexpected on a flank or to the rear, in a ices atmosphere and of torment, in gendered the feeling of sturdy attacks delivered from superior forces much and not always induced to an appreciation of answering the situation in truth, and above all to attribute to the Greek Command an audacity that in truth did not exist.

This was proceeding to some modifications. In the within of the III Corps, 1 December entered online the 17th Inf. Div., climbing over the 13th that passed into the second formation. The difficulties to acclimatize them did not concur with the 17th to engage themselves at once in depth for the conquest of the main objective: the Guri Regjanit, on the Kamia. The K group was seen to remove the 11th Inf. Div., last to the dependencies of the II Corps, and so entrusted the entire field to the 10th Inf. Div.

In the meantime Vercellino had taken the provision definitively to remove from the front the all most worn out and scattered units, whose Commands already had been withdrawn, for the indispensable reordering: the units of the *Parma* had to be sent at once into the Devoli valley, to north of Gramshi, and those of the *Piemonte*, to short expiration, in the zone of Kukes-Librazhd.

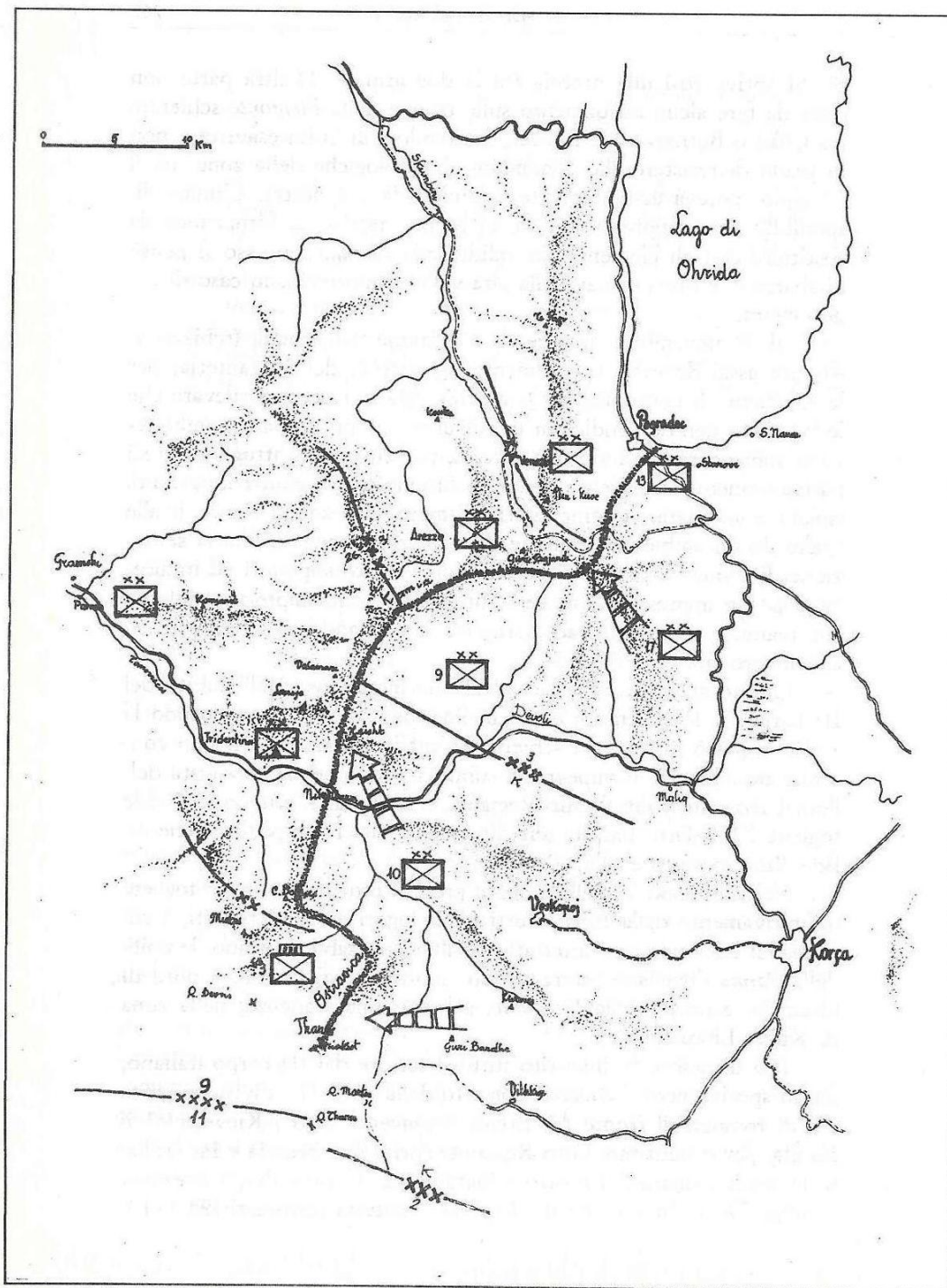
On 3 December was invested all the field of the Italian III Corps, but in special way the *Arezzo*. Task of the Greek 9th and 17th division was to break off the forehead between Bregu Brezavet and Pleu i Kieve, that is the Kamia, in order to conquer Guri Regjanit, open a breach and to make to collapse the left flank of our alignment. Against Bregu Brezavet and Bregu Dragotin acted the 27th and 32nd infantry reinforced (9th Inf. Div.);

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 299

The situation of the 9th Army on 30 November

Schizzo n. 41

LA SITUAZIONE DELLA 9^a ARMATA IL 30 NOVEMBRE

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

against Guri Regjanit and Pleu i Kieve the 31st and the 29th infantry in column (17th Inf. Div.). After alternating assault to counterassault, vigorous lead from the men of the *Venezia* and of the *Arezzo*, the Greeks were temporary stopped. At noon Vercellino was induced to Soddu sending a *personal confidential letter*:

"The situation on the front of the III and XXVI C.A. is very serious. The adversary attacks in forces on the entire front with the cooperation of much artillery and fresh troops. The climatic conditions have remarkably aggravating the situation.

It is not possible not to think to an eventual withdraw puts into effect under pressure of the adversary and therefore I have renewed the order to remain on the place.

To my warning it would be necessary that new elements came deployed on obstructions to be define by the armed Comando Superiore in order to harmonize the action of the two.

It is from holding present that the troops currently online are in such conditions to supply a limited confidence on their operating ability after an eventual withdraw. Such ability will be resumed only where it can be carried the unit in locality adapted for a period of rest and restoration of the square, the following, the arms and the equipment and clothing"⁽⁴⁰⁾.

In the afternoon resumed the Greek action and to 15:00 contrasted the position of Pleu i Kieve fell. Little after it was the time of Guri Regjanit. Dynamic reactions of the *Venezia* divisional reserve did not succeed seal the breach. Towards 17:00 also Bregu Dragotin and Mt. Sareces was occupied by the enemy. Counter assault lead with last exhausted the reinforcements available at night fall, arrested the Greeks on the Macikak-Brumbulinit line. That evening Arisio reassumed the events, after what had been the up to now endured more violent attack from the III Corps, and the determined provisions in order to contain the land to the enemy and to arrest him however on the line Lem Giaferit- Te Puzi-B. Macullit- Skumbini roadway (sketch n. 42) and he commented coldly:

"The situation which it is introduced this evening is without serious doubt: the worn out troops for the combats and the bad weather, with few officers, are striking well and contend to the adversary the land. But until when that can last? It depends evidently on the imponderable and from how many the enemy will make".

Vercellino, in reporting to the Comando Superiore, wrote: "*It is mine as commander who must specify that the units and the individuals of the divisions Arezzo and Venezia only withdraw in front to the superpower of*

40) DSCSFAA. f. 1.339 dated 3.12.1940.

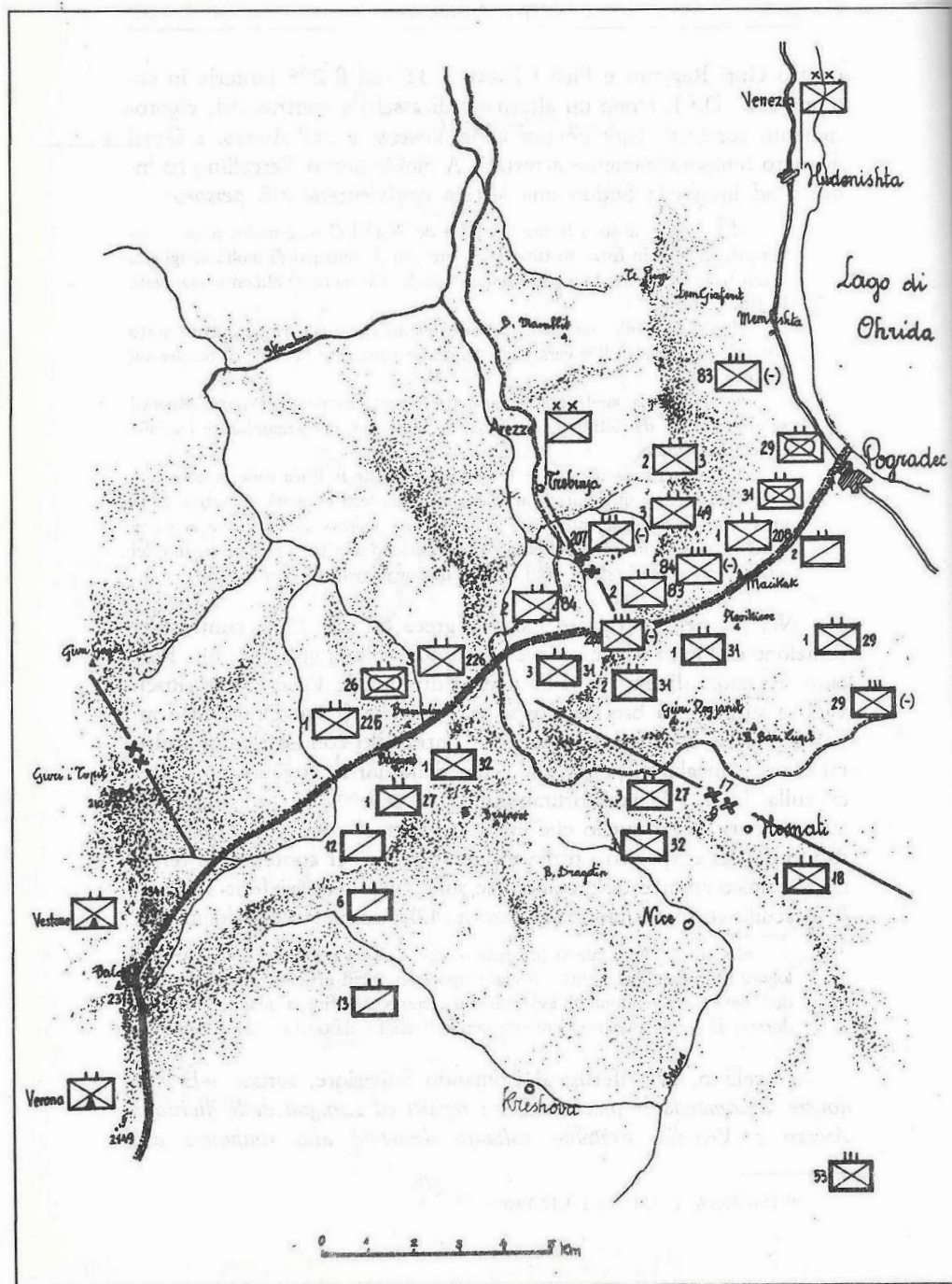
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 268

The situation of the III Army Corps on 3 December

Schizzo n. 4

LA SITUAZIONE DEL III CORPO D'ARMATA IL 3 DICEMBRE



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

enemy but heroically marking the road with blood"⁽⁴¹⁾. And truth the fighting on the Kamia was heated, hand to hand, on farm land, rich of coves and overhanging. The Greek official reports annotates: (...) "*On that eternal cliff, testimony of the Greek courage, was finds again many Greek and Italian transfixed with the bayonet and soldiers remained on their feet*"⁽⁴²⁾.

In the night the news from the XXVI Corps arrived that the company of the Financial police of garrison to Kualibardhe was encircled and had the hours numbered, and that it had been endured ordered to the III Bn. of the Financial police at all costs to hold the positions of Gostanghes and Velushes, with the outpost of Trubhova, consolidating contact with the 3rd infantry. The daily historian of the 9th Army closes the day of the 4th with this note:

"In the morning arrives at Elbasan Soddu in order to confer with his Excellency Vercellino on the situation.

In the afternoon his Excellency Soddu returns to Elbasan with his Excellency Cavallero for the same goal. Prompt promises reinforcements come".

5. THE COMBAT ON THE EPIRUS FRONTIER.

The rearrangement of the forces, deriving from the new ordering assumed in Albania, was faced by the 11th Army in conditions slightly better than what was happening in the Korçano. The Ciamuria army corps was constituted since the beginning of the hostilities and, all adding, had acquired a sure stability. After the arrest of the offensive push, the systemizing of the positions caught up had begun trying to confer a minimum of defense continuity and a strengthening in the more dangerous features, particularly on the left. On 14 November, from the Voidomati to the sea were succeeded the following sectors:

I sector (Col. Solinas), with the XXIV/5th and the XXVII/2nd bersaglieres, one cp. light tanks and two batteries of 149/13. It had the task of giving safety to the left flank of the Army Corps and to knit it materially with both the *Bari* and with the *Ferrara* by means of mobile elements eventually and with the static defense of one position to the west of the Perati-Kalibaki roadway;

II sector (Gen. Zannini) with at the time the *Ferrara* reinforced and the task of resistance in place on the Kalibaki-Kakavia director;

41) DS Command 9th Army, Tele. situation 20:00 hours of the 3.12.1940.

42) Greek S.M.E., op, cit, vol. III, pag. 103.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

III sector (Maj. Campini) with the II/2nd Bersaglieres and IV Bn. Albanians volunteers of the Maj Grandi, to protect the right of the *Ferrara* and connection with the *Siena*;

IV sector (Gen. Gabutti) with the *Siena*, the defense of the lower Kalamas; in reserve of army corps: II/31st wagons, XXII/5th and IV/2nd Bersaglieres and I gr. sqd. of the Guides (sketch n. 43).

It cannot be said that the line was guaranteed and in fact its frailty will come at once put to hard test, but at least the dangers deriving from a hypothetical breakthrough were limited. The things appeared difficult in the feature between Konitsa and Ersekë, entrusted to the *Bari* after the withdrawal of the *Julia* from the Pindo. To the pull back of the *Julia*, the 8th alpine and the *Conegliano* group, very tried, was moved to Premeti in order to reorder itself. To the 9th alpine and the *Udine* group, still in good conditions, they remained entrusted the positions of Konitsa temporary, to the dependencies of *Bari*, than with own elements it was being arranged to obstruction of the valleys of the Sarandaporos. From the 11th to the 14th the Greek attacks they were followed almost uninterruptedly. Successful small local counter-assaults were canceling from continuous delivery with all the forces available, leading comprised. The forehead held, but the losses were sensitive and the defense was made exhausted. On 15 November, when Gen. Bancale, than the day before had been introduced to Dervicani by Gen. Visconti Prasca, reached Leskoviku, headquarters of the Commander of the *Bari*, the alignment was the following: from Leskoviku to Bagni di Kukes, the 140th; from the Bagni di Kukes to Konitsa, the 139th, the 9th alp., the I/1st Bers. and the 152nd cc.nn. Bn.; in the bridgehead of Perati, light tank Bn. with minor units; in sector reserve, the VII/1st Bers. and the motorcyclists company of the Bers.

To north of Leskoviku, in the zone of Ersekë (comprised in the sector of the XXVI Army Corps) the *Azzaro* grouping⁽⁴³⁾ was found, with the task to assure of the possession and to maintain the connection with the left of the 11th army.

We know as it was important for the Greeks to retake Konitsa and how much effort addressed, but the Perati Bridge was sufficiently to the safety. More worrisome the situation to the flanks. The Greek 1st cavalry division strongly pressed against *Solinas* grouping (XVII/2nd and XIV /5th Bersaglieres) and the extreme left of the *Ferrara* and the combats carried out with a course not

43) Command 1st Bersaglieres, IX/1st and XXVI/4th Bersaglieres, two rifle companies of the 140th infantry and one battery of 75/13.

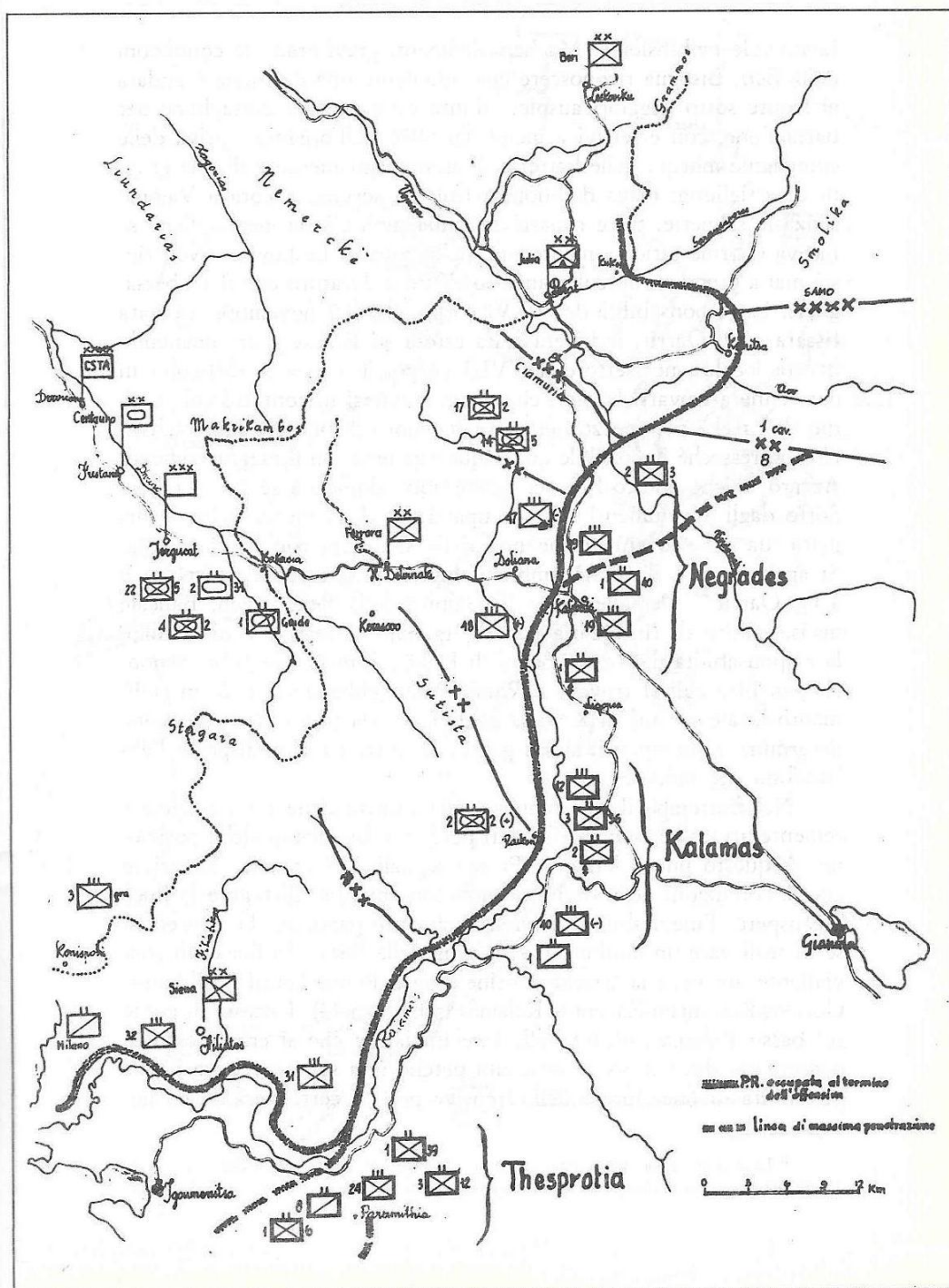
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 271

The alignment with the *Ciamuria* Army Corps on 14 November

Schizzo n. 45

LO SCHIRAMENTO DEL CORPO D'ARMATA «CIAMURIA» IL 14 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

favorable to us in total. But otherwise very serious they were the conditions of the *Bari*. It must recognize that very rarely a division has gone to the front under gets worse auspices: arriving and employed battalion by battalion; with effectives less of 50% of the organic strength; it was deprives of the mortar companies, the batteries of accompaniment and two groups of artillery; it deprives of good part of the services, still at Valona; without the baggage train, all remained in Italy, are not to being astonished if it made enormous hard work to maintain itself in the zone of Leskoviku. It never did not succeed to take a sure and long-lasting connection with the 1st bersaglieres. The responsibility of the XXVI Corps, that on 7 November it had been fixed at Q. Qarrit, the 13th had been extended to Ersekë, also remaining this locality in the sector of the VIII Corps. However the difficulties in which it came to find the Bari, that had to be kept in contact with the garrison of Ersekë for means of the patrolling of motorcyclists coy., rendered any relationship with the *Azzaro* grouping almost impossible, so that this ended for being abandoned to if same and being induced from the events to more preoccupy the right of the 9th Army, from which it came, than not of the joint with the 11th Armed. In addition that on 16 November the sector limit will be brought back to Q. Qarrit⁽⁴⁴⁾. In order to lighten the task of the *Bari*, Gen. Bancale determined endured to reinforce it with the *Tolmezzo* alp. Bn. and to entrust the responsibility of the feature Bagni di Kukes -Konitsa to the *Julia*. Then, while it found itself to Perati Bridge had news of a local yielding to north of Konitsa and, before the dangerous inflection determined from the repeated Greek efforts, being forced to predispose the abandonment of the salient.

In the meantime the 47th infantry, to the left of the *Ferrara*, violently attacked, endured important losses and left some position. To this point Visconti Prasca signaled the Comando Superiore who the conditions of the division did not concur to hold the line and showed the inevitability of a partial regression, that concurred to realize a minimum of economy of the forces. The line more convenient appeared the Ersekë - border until to Perati Bridge - Basilikon- Gormos river – Kastaniani - Raveni- Kalamas river (sketch n.44). The bridgehead on the lower Kalamas, created in the initial phase and that it had been attempted to conserve, it had to be evacuated because there was no caught the slightest possibility of a resumption of the offensive for a sure period and also

44) The communication, by letter, reached the 11th Army Commander only on the 19th, when already the retreat of the *Azzaro* grouping had happened by order of the XXVI. C.A.,

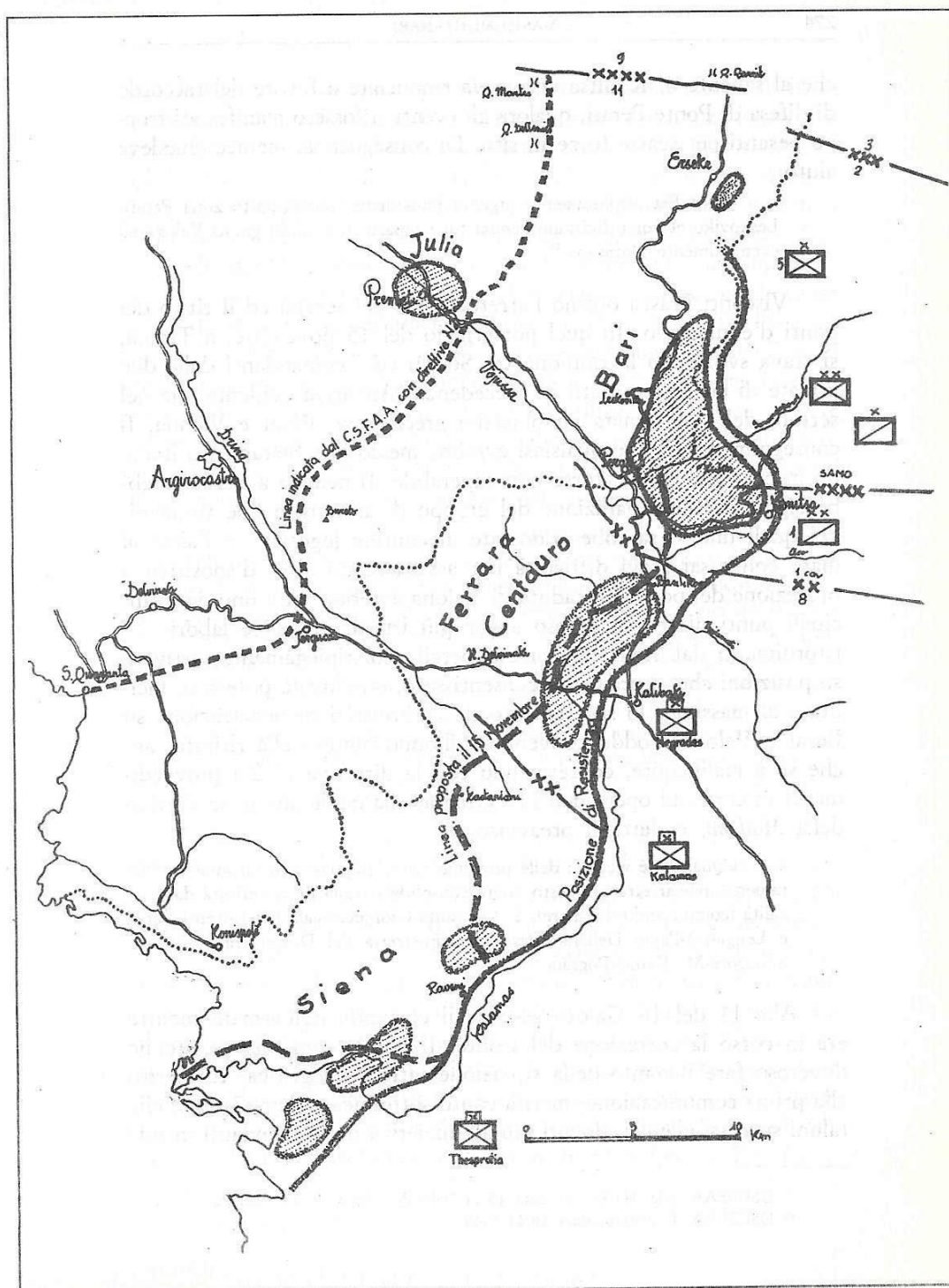
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 273

The alignment with the 11th Army on 14 November

Schizzo n. 44

LO SCHIERAMENTO DELL'11 ARMATA IL 14 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

to the salient of Konitsa it was necessary to renounce to favor of the connection of defense of the Perati Bridge, in case the events had been manifested much too heavy for insufficient forces in situated. Consequently, while he asked aid:

"(...) It is absolutely immediate urgent truck transport zone Perati - Leskoviku & zone *Ferrara* division all units available arriving at Valona and eventually Durazzo"⁽⁴⁵⁾.

Visconti Prasca ordered to the regression of the services and the withdrawal of the bridge crew. In that afternoon of 15 November, at Tirana, was carrying out the meeting between Soddu and the commanders of the two Armies with which it has been spoken previously. It appeared obvious that in the sector of the 11th Army the objectives of the Greeks was Berat and Valona. The attainment of whichever one would have put the Italian alignment in the most serious crisis, perhaps not surmountable. The enemy at Berat would have meant the separation of the army group in two stumps, of which one would have leaned to the Yugoslavian border and the other to the sea with much serious difficulties in order to assume another alignment for protection of the ports. The fall of Valona would have removed one of the main points of disembarkation available and still more bristling than laborious ties and the supplies from Italy. It was necessary therefore, with the withdraw, to arrive on positions that sure consent, or at least could facilitate to the maximum, the obstruction of the direction of penetration on Berat and Valona. Soddu convene on the opportunity of the withdrawal, even if to reluctantly, confirming with directive n. 2 the provisions in course to work of the 11 Army, to which he announced the arrival of the *Modena*, and said the warning:

"In case the vicissitudes of the next actions imposed a new more rear alignment, this will have to consolidate on the line defined from the localities (beginning from the sea): S. Quaranta - Giorgucat-valleys of the streams Suhes and Lengatica - Dellenjes Pass - Martës Pass- narrows of the Devoli between Kornicà and Suhagore - Mt. Kamia - Pogradec"⁽⁴⁶⁾.

At 11:00 the 16th Geloso assumed the command of the army while it was in course the correction of the front. The new commander thought right to make the point of the tactical and logistic situation. With respect to the first communication, he deserves account to emphasize the admission that some Greek successes, had more to the initiative of the subordinate commanders

45) DSCSFAA, tele. 026085/op. dated 15.11.1940 of Commander 11th army,

46) DSCSFAA, f. 294/op. dated 16.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

that to a set up operating design on the infiltration tactics, probably they had been possible for not pushed local resistances to bottom because of material and psychological factors denied to you; let alone the intention, "that I will put into effect gradually", to shorten further the front of the *Ciamuria* army corps withdrawing on the positions with Butrinto – Kazanja - Jerguçat- Makrikamb (sketch n. 45).

On the held issue of the insufficiency of some units it will be opportune to return opportunely, for it must of objectivity, searching the causes first of such behavior; causes, on the other hand, so far intuitive. On the point of the ulterior reduction of the front is clearly the guideline of Geloso not to attend the Greek attacks on a line of insufficient little robustness and economic, and to use the positions headed as indicated intermediate regarding those specified from the directive n. 2. And that the situation was not improved a lot, to the term of the short retrograde movement, it emerges from the report of Gen. C. Rossi:

"(...) But a effective defense - which the situation imposes - would demand to be able to arrange of the entire alpine grouping (3 battalions) that made to me anticipate yesterday, for that the more physical situation that moral of the troops would not resist to well organized an enemy attack. It urges especially to replace the *Ferrara* division, and while to have elements which would face the threat coming from the valleys of the Fitoki. Every battalion (even if isolated and incomplete) will be precious reinforces, and is necessary indeed that it comes sent to me very soon.

In such situation prospect that also a new withdraw - it is clear on a position already studied - could not well succeed without the support of fresh units, preventively deployed on the new position"⁽⁴⁷⁾

In front of the 11th Army they were the Greek I and II Corps. But while it depended on the High Command, the other was framed in the SAMO, that it could be cause of some disadvantage for coordination difficulty. The II Corps, organize in the sector of the Pindo, had of the 1st Inf. Div., the 5th infantry brigade, the cavalry brigade and two groups of reconnaissance. It had received the order to get hold of the outlet on the ridge of the Grammos, towards Leskoviku, to cover the right of the Corps and to cooperate to the III Corp's offensive of towards Korça. In particular its commander, Gen. Papadopoulos, had to aim at Ersekë by previous agreements made with General Tsolakoglou. Since the cavalry brigade was reordering itself in the zone of Distraton - Samarina, the task to proceed on Konitsa and

47) DS Commander XXV Army Corps, f. 970/op. dated 17.11.1940.

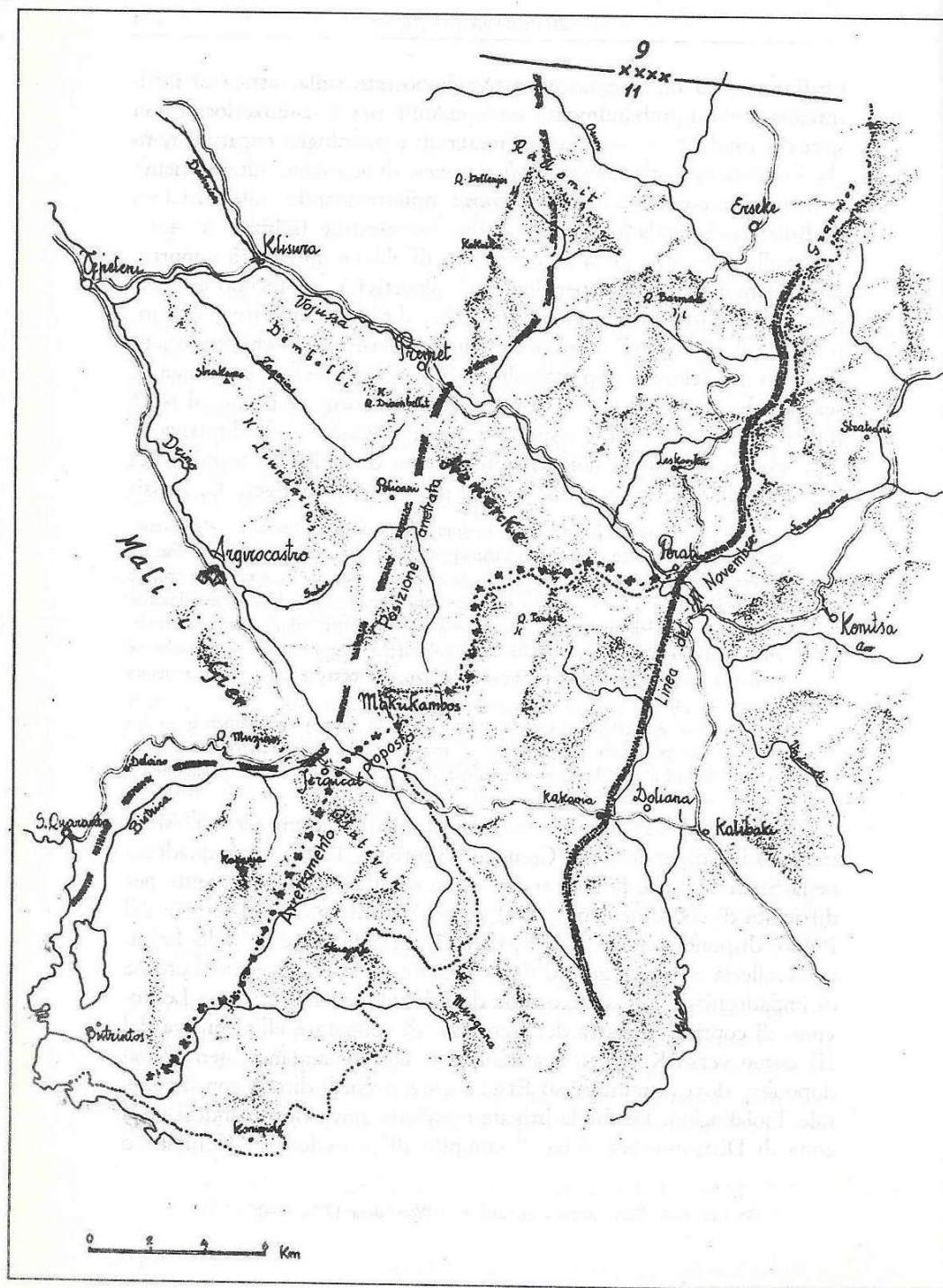
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 276

The operating perspectives with the 11th Army on 17 November

Schizzo n. 45

LE PROSPETTIVE OPERATIVE PER L'11 ARMATA IL 17 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the border was entrusted to the 1st division reinforced from the 5th brigade. However the directives of the II Corps were set up on one line of much prudential conduct: to conserve the defensive positions Stavros - Ghiftisa - Kleftis; not to let to couple in the push towards the ridge from superior forces but to degrade towards the foretold alignment being slowed down the Italian advance; to cover, finally, the left flank from the origins of Konitsa.

Between the 14th and the 17th were a slow approach to the ridge with actions of insufficient consistency in the few localities where were occupied by Italian elements. The disposition was articulated in two groups (sketch n. 46). That northerner, of four battalions ⁽⁴⁸⁾, moving towards the feature of the mountain crest to the head of Mylapotamos in order to then strike with the fire the roadway of Ersekë; the southern grouping, that it comprised the bulk of the division and was subdivided in more detachments, had to be arranged securely to the east from the Sarandaporos, and at the same time to push elements on the ridge towards south-east in order to cooperate to the conquest of Konitsa from part of the contiguous division of cavalry. On 17 November, aware that the 11th Army good part of front was correcting, Gen. Papadopoulos ordered the 1st Inf. Div. to move on Leskoviku and Ersekë. But it arrived at once another blow of brake from the SAMO: the II Corps had to assure the line Mt. Stavros - Mt. Kleftis and to orient all its forces towards north in order to support the III Corps' action against the southern flank of the defense of Korça. All therefore it was resolved in one aimed at Ersekë and the next folding to the border. Nevertheless it could not be difficult to imagine how much the Italian Comando Supremo and Gen. Soddu feared the fall of the Leskoviku - Ersekë artery, than they were not in conditions for protect.

When, 16 November, the 11th Army tried to have reliable news on Ersekë, it had to state that the locality was lost, its garrison had not only not been able to be connected with the *Bari*, and therefore it knew nothing of the events in course in the field of the 11th Army, but it had ended for being detached also from the 9th Army, whose extreme right had been forced to degrade and to constitute astride of the Leskoviku-Korça roadway, by now under the fire enemy, a defensive flank towards the south. On 11 November between Q. Barmash, where had arrived the *Bari*, and Q. Qarrit, where the right of the 9th Army reached,

48) II/7th, III/51st, I/52nd and I/2nd infantry with the 5th brigade Command.

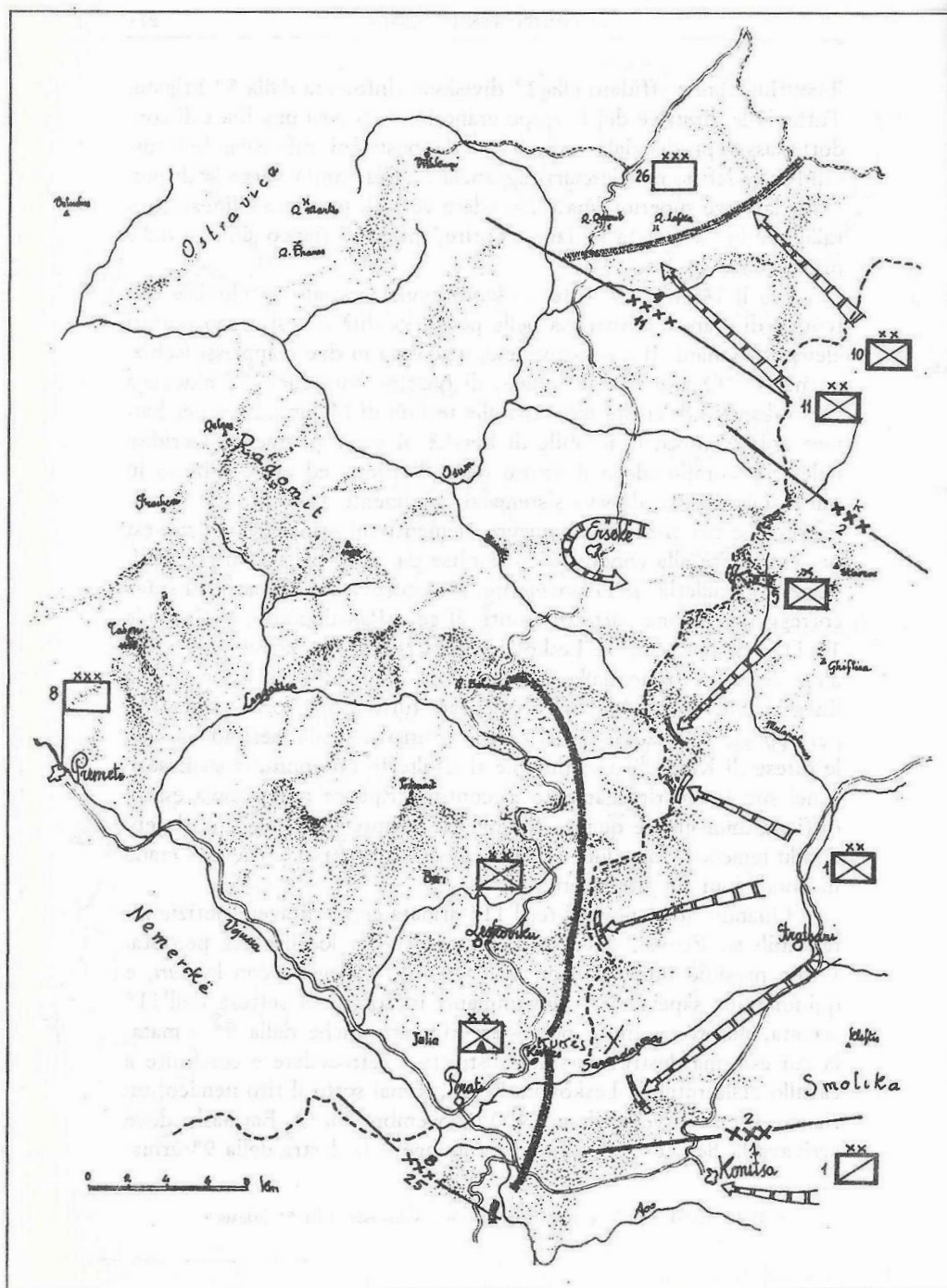
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 278

The alignment with the VIII Army Corps on 17 November

Schizzo n. 46

LO SCHIERAMENTO DELL'VIII CORPO D'ARMATA IL 17 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

there was the void: complete void. One opened the Greeks free and of all the defenseless one valleys of the Osum, is worth to say the road for Berat. That day a daring and maneuvering enemy could, to its choice, to proceed for the valleys Lengatica on Premeti and to cut to behind of the VIII Corps roadway of Vojussa valley, or to head along the Misicke stream, on the upper Osum and, following of the course, to head directly at Berat. The situation was rendered more serious from the fact that the 139th infantry of the *Bari* remained nearly lacking in ammunitions and had endured such losses not to turn out practically more employable, since the enormous feature of the front from Ersekë to Perati Bridge remained in effects entrusted to two regiments: 140th with the average three battalions and the 9th alpine with two! It was not possibility to re-establish the situation with the troops in place, all engaged to here of their limits; but since then group was disembarked Albania in the 1st alpine *Valle* group and was beginning unloading also the *Modena*, Geloso thought that an immediate counterattack of the alpine group in the direction of Ersekë would have, at least, been able to inflict a serious blow to the Greek forces that had occupied the locality; continuing in the undertaken action therefore with the *Modena* it would be resolutions to lighten the opposing pressure both on the Perati Bridge and on the right of the 9th Army. In such a way, on one side the threat would have blanketed that was outlined through the open door of Ersekë and from the other the time necessary would have been earned in order to organize the withdraw well and to complete it, probably, without the chasing Greeks.

With this vision the 17th the alpine group was put to disposition of the VIII Corps with the order to make use some in order to counterattack the left flank of the enemy in the Ersekë zone. But the design could not have ever an execution principle. The 1st alpine group was, yes, arrived but without artilleries and baggage train; they lacked, therefore, all the premises in order to lead seriously and with some hope of succeeding a counterattack, since the battalions would not have had the possibility of being supplied with ammunition and rations and, consequently, could not have pushed itself to the bottom as it was necessary so that the operation was profitable. The artilleries of the group arrived after some days; the baggage train instead did not ever put foot in Albania for all the duration of the campaign. The *Modena*, then, was disembarking spaced out in several transports. It would have had need of a sure period in order to reorder the units, but the numerous and continues tactical success of the enemy threatened to sweep up the line, on the verge of collapse in more points, so that it was necessary to supply of urgency to make them stop

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

and to support the doors that were in order to be broken. The result but, for the division, was that it stopped being a major unit and could only reform itself after several months. It was good luck that only the 21st the Greek II Corps had free road from the High command for an attack that in two days carried it to occupy both Ersekë and Leskoviku. For the Greeks the battle of the Pindo was therefore concluded.

On 18 November the *Bari*, now commanded by Gen. D'Havet, it held the field from Q. Barmash to Bagni di Kukes with the 140th infantry, the 8th alpine (less a Bn.), and the III/4th bersaglieres; the *Julia*, the bridgehead of Perati with the 139th infantry, the 9th alpine, the *Cividale* Bn., I/1st Bersaglieres and Tank Bn.. Gen Bancale perceived critical the moment. He left a Valle Bn. at Klisura, to await of the announced arrival of the III Carabinieri Bn., in order to block in every eventuality the Lomnica valley and he sent the *Val Tagliamento* Bn. to Perati in support of the *Julia*. The 22nd he arrives at Premeti Geloso. He wanted to know exactly as they were the things in order to make a decision. Bancale express frankly the opinion that for effect of the wearing down (losses and hard work), of the lowering of the moral, the insufficiency of means for the feeding of the fight, of the absolute lack of troops tried not launch in a strong counterattack, the resistance on the positions occupied in that moment could not be extended. All that having nothing to do with consequences of the absence of flank supports. He proposed therefore to voluntarily withdraw on the right of the Lengatica, in the picture of the warning circulated from the commander of the army; that that would have concurred to earn a little space and time in order to arrange on the new positions outside of the contact with the enemy. Geloso convene on the opportunity of the measure, but, because of the gravity of the decision, wanted to consult Soddu, also authorizing at once to the movement of the artilleries not equipped with own means of transport and the performance of the relative predispositions to the execution of the retrograde movement.

In front of the stated difficulty to resist against an isolated attack, the Comando Superiore had already accepted the idea of an withdraw on the line P. Edda (S. Quaranta) - Jerguçat- Suhes valleys and Lengatica-Q. Dellenjes-Q. Martes-narrows of the Devoli between Kosnice and Suhagora-M. Kalnia - Pogradec (directive n. 2), but obviously unwilling. To the insistences of the Army commanders of Soddu he answered with the directive n. 3, which, also confirming the cited line "*in case the vicissitudes imposed a alignment more withdraws*", insisted on the purpose

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to resist on the place and, while, to sketch out a new P.D. with the forces of recent arrival.

But the line, on which the 11th Army would have had to consolidate in definitive way, if answered to political requirement not to abandon locality whose loss would have provoked great clamor, did not possess the indispensable characteristics for a sure defense, with unit impoverished and worn out of in front of a revived enemy for the inflow of fresh G.U.. Geloso had visited all the sector, conferred with several the commanders, observed the units and had been persuaded of the necessity of withdrawn on scale much a more width, that it removed for some time the army from the Greek pressure without rest and avoided the constant trickle of losses of men and materials provoked from the frequent minor retreats, which ended with the being set up and always completed with the enemy at the heels.

It was necessary therefore, to its warning, a resolute decision and such decision, in truth very serious, could not that to refer to the positions of reduced centers, previewed from P.R. 12, whose axis ran largely on the alignment t. Borshi-Q: Drass-plateau of the Kurvelesh – Tepeleni – Klisura – Qarishta - Ostravice, with opportune turning to the wings Believed moreover that a long permanence was not only harmful to us until on the indefensible line of border, but that also a withdraw limited to a middle position, between the border and the Tepeleni - Klisura feature, could have provoked the shattering of the units of the army with the consequence to open to the enemy the ways of access to Valona and Berat. To stop on one whichever intermediate line meant, to its way to see, to accept on it the decisive battle when it would be at the pleasure of the Greeks, in whose hands were the initiative; battle that we were not then in conditions for leading and for supporting. Therefore the pause on one whichever line to southeast of Tepeleni - Klisura could not for the 11th Army be that temporary, also because while the 9th Army would have found on the Kamia and in the narrows of the Devoli, preceded from sturdy the massive* of the Ostravice, optimal points of support, null similar existed in the sector of the 11th Army, where the land between the Radomit and the sea is all much practicable and difficultly defensible. Finally, the new formation, with the right wing moved a lot ahead, towards south-east, in order to maintain the possession of Santi Quaranta, was still anything but economic.

It is in any case necessary to specify that initially the decision to withdraw was taken under the worry of the circumstances, without a clear

*massiccio

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

total vision. This came maturing during the resistance to the shelter of the border until assuming its definitive character on 22 November, when it was decided to lead the army on the positions of Tepeleni - Klisura. Naturally the purpose existed to stop the regression on an intermediate line, before objects of remarkable political value (Premeti – Argirocastro - Santi Quaranta), if the new divisions had arrived in time. Therefore the maneuver was conceived in two is made. First phase they it had to more carry the formation on a line that give the bay of Sajada ran until to the Makrikambos, more or less hugging the border, then headed towards the north: Lengatica valley - Q. Dellenjes - Q. Martes (welding point with the 9th Army). With the second phase - where -the device had become indispensable would have carried out an ulterior regression on the cited line t. Borshi - Kurvelesh- Tepeleni – Klisurarishita - Ostravice.

For obvious the maneuver reasons had to be rendered note and made to put into effect from the second dependent Commands partial follow-up orders, for being able to guide it to tight bridles and times locked like the situation it advised and it imposed. It was, that is, necessary to avoid that single initiatives could determine retrograde movements not perfectly coordinate or much too express, whereas the delicacy of the circumstances demanded a methodical movement and slow for being able to always reach on the successive positions with the same forces, while the insistence of the Greek attacks, renewed by fresh troops, it did not give truce and it rendered the uncoupling difficult. Consequently they did not come formally indicated since from the beginning rear middle positions and P.D., but about bit by bit was spoken about new line of resistance. Under the technical aspect probably the measure was tests, since the withdrawn maneuver in introduces more difficulty than any other, however it was from placing on the balance also continuous the ulterior lowering of tone of the units of forehead to the successive abandonment of positions on which of one by one had been ordered the resistance to the end.

On the 19th Geloso circulated the directives for the withdraw, with reservation to emanate the executive order. The preventive occupation of the Sajada – Makrikambos - Q line. Martes was entrusted to units in arrival, whose broken up employment was judged as the only suitable provision to avoid the fracture of the front and the consequent change in route of what it had to be an ordered retreat. The danger of an initiative to wide beam remained in feet for the valleys of the Osum and the Tomorreces, with objective Berat or Klisura. In lack of consist organic units it was necessary to supply in a first one

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

time at least with some light unit. It came, therefore, ordered that the III Bn. of the Guardia di Finanza, put to such scope to disposition from the Comando Superiore, and two Albanian centuries of cc.nn. a tactical group for the putting in action of obstructions succeeded to concentrated at Fieri to constitute *in the high valleys of the Osum and the Tomorreces*. With this modest element, place to the dependencies of the VIII Corps, could be contained the first opposing infiltration until the *Pusteria* division arrived on the scene (sketch n. 47).

The withdraw had to be carried out in groups. With the first jump the XXV Corps⁽⁴⁹⁾ ended undoubtedly in order to still be more ahead of the rest of the alignment, however the disadvantage was not ready eliminable, having to draw back a remarkable amount of material located between the Dhrinos and the sea, while the units of the Vojussa valley not only had minors *impediments*, but absolute necessity was found in the withdraw in order to promptly succeed to *reconstitute the obstruction of the Osum valley and to resume* the contact with the 9th Army, which, in the meantime, lost Korça, was carrying to the rear its forces. Naturally it was impossible to put into effect the uncoupling to the moment. In the field of the XXV Corps the modifications already brought to the alignment had not brought much relief (sketch n. 48). Always chased everywhere, less than in correspondence of the lower Kalamas, the troops grabbed hold of to the relief of the land. The insertion of the Greek 2nd Inf. Div. in the fight was made to feel more and more strongly on all the fronts of the *Ferrara*. At 14:15 of the 19th Gen. Zannini telephoned the head of the S.M. of the army corps, informing that "*the Ferrara is exhausted. It has an enormous front. If in order this evening at least two battalions of reinforcements do not reach the line cannot more be held*". It was promised a Bn. of the *Modena*, but the promise could not be maintained because another area was also in crisis. At 21:00 hours the 47th infantry withdrew with many losses, while to the northeast of Lakanokasrro the *Solinas* grouping resisted with difficulty for a day still, then fell back on Vesane, to the West of the Gormos, with the *residual unusable*. At dawn of the 20th the fight resumed deprived of hope. The commander of the 47th infantry signaled the insufficient validity of the units remaining. The telephone communications were interrupted, the radios defective. At 10:00 the Vesane - Delvinaki cart track was blocked by units in retreat and of ran off the rails. At 11:00 the commander of

49) On 17 November the *Ciamuria* Army Corps had assumed the indicative of the XXV Army Corps.

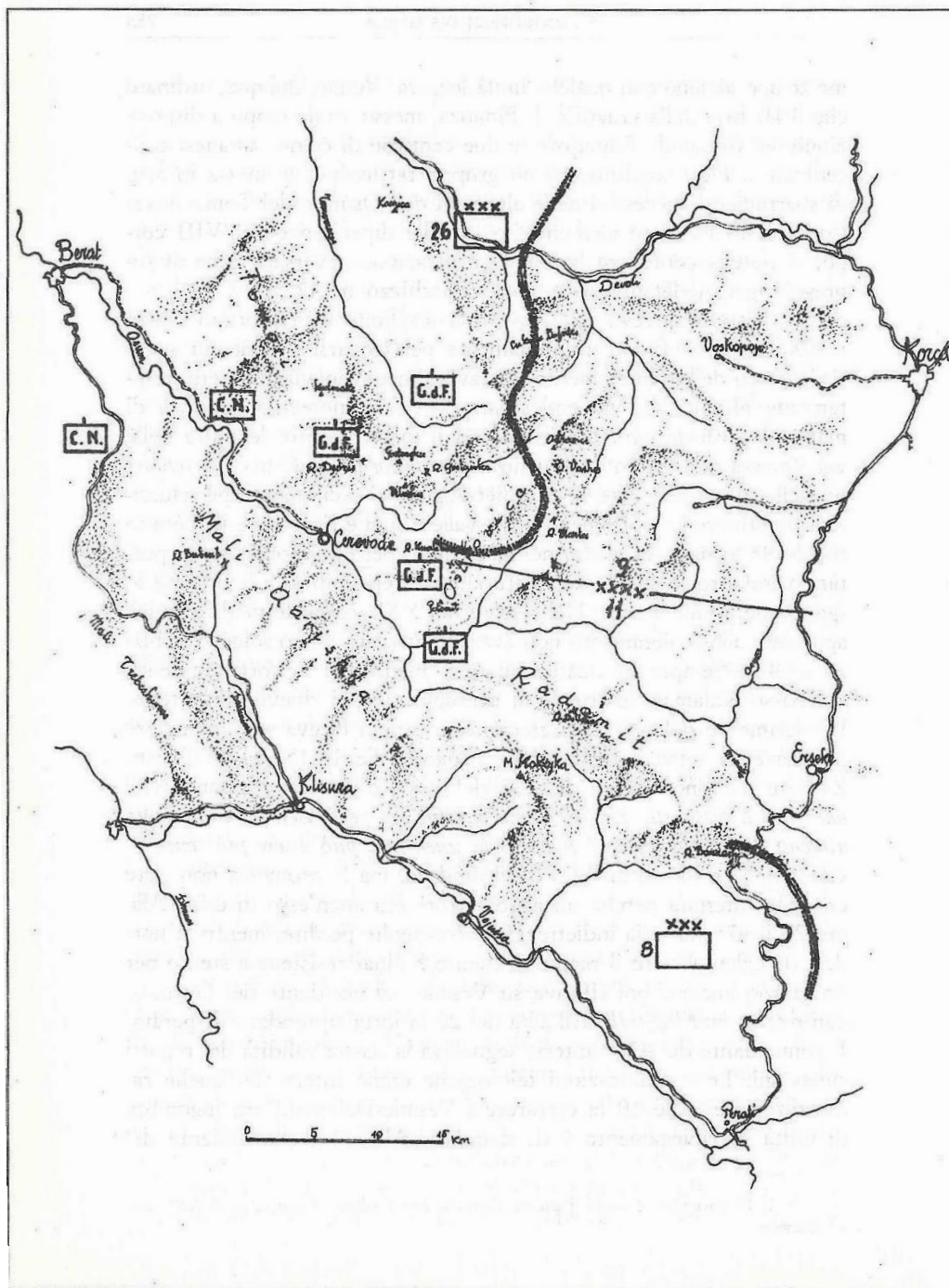
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 284

The passage between the 9th Army and the 11th Army in the high valleys
of the Osum 22 November

Schizzo n. 47

IL VARCO FRA LA 9^a E L'11^a ARMATA NELL'ALTA VALLE DELL'OSUM IL 22 NOVEMBRE



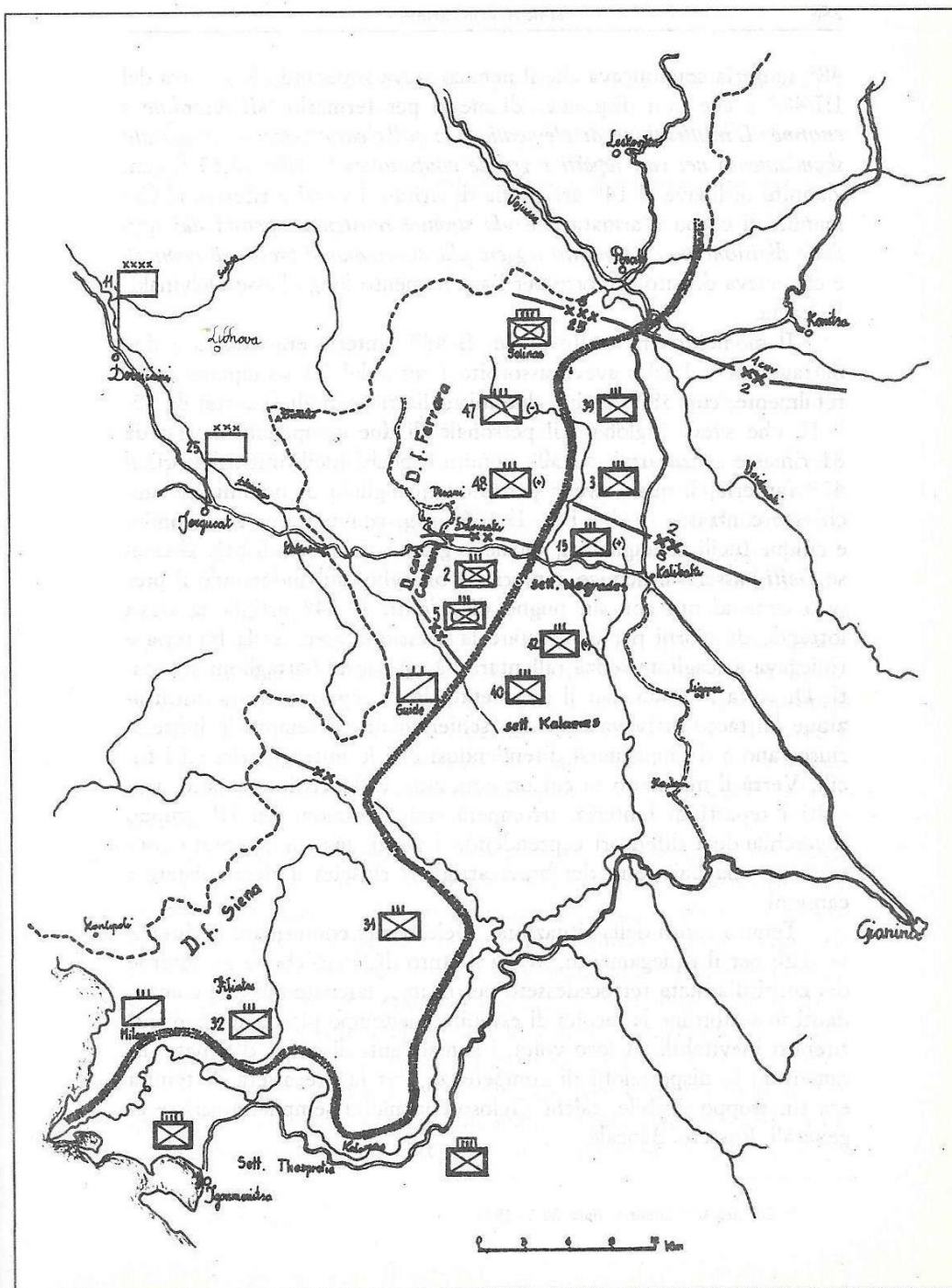
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 285

The alignment of XXV the Army Corps on 17 November

Schizzo n. 48

LO SCHIERAMENTO DEL XXV CORPO D'ARMATA IL 17 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

48th infantry communicated that the enemy was exceeding the left of the III/48th and that did not have means in order to stop them. *"The disorder is enormous. The infiltration of Greek elements on the cart track has provoked to collapse in several the units and great confusion"*⁽⁵⁰⁾. At 12:35 Gen. Zannini ordered the 14th artillery to withdraw the guns and reported to the Commander of the army corps that *"the courageous opposite resistance from the rests of the division has not been able to resist to the over excited enemy pressure"* and that had to arrange for the long regression on the Delvinaki - Kakavia axis.

The moment was very serious. The 48th infantry was reduced to two battalions: the I, that had absorbed the rests of the III disappeared nearly totally, with 380 men, two machine-guns and twelve 45 mm. mortars; the II, that the personnel of two companies had absorbed the remained 81 mm mortars without crews, with 300 men and a few machine gun. The 47th infantry, which she had lost a thousand men, was also contracted it on two Bns. The 166th cc.nn. Bn. had 240 men and five machineguns. Still the same day and the Albanian *Dajti* Bn. pass to the enemy with arms and baggage, abandoning own commander with a handful of soldiers. The 140th artillery was fighting for days in order to contrast the Greek pressure on the infantry and retreating groups without to slow down the support to the exhausted battalions. One by one, for the yielding of an unit or an infiltration the attack arrived until to the alignments, and always the batteries succeeded to save themselves defending with the machine-guns and the guns. The moment will come in which the nth most violent onslaught, swept up the units of infantry, burst in on positions of the III group surpassing the defenders and taking the guns, but a hopeless counter assault with the bayonet of the good artillerymen succeed to retake the guns.

Held account of the situation, Geloso, in confirming the directives given for the withdraw, had while decided that the inner wings of the army corps retreated for last, leaving to the two subordinate commanders in the small faculty to execute indeed time thought movements unavoidable. To their time, the commanders of army corps circulated the competence dispositions, but the precariousness of capacity was since too much visible, such that Geloso with much simplicity wrote Generals Rossi and Bancale:

50) DS of the 48th infantry, dated 20.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

"I have absolute need that the troops still hold on, put into effect their resistance positions. That because they can be assured:

- the arrival of the remaining troops destined to the outline of the new line especially for as much concerns the VIII Corps;
- the influx and the withdrawal of the materials of artillery and engineers" (51).

On 21 November was given the executive order, with beginning the same evening.

6. THE WITHDRAW OF THE 11th ARMY.

That morning of 21 November the Greek II Corps had recovered in motion with the 5th brigade and the 1st I.D. (sketch n. 49).

The first without to meet resistance, indeed without to meet some, recaptured Erseke already reached and soon abandoned the 17th, but was arrested with the bulk to east of the roadway. The second one acted with a objective extremely limited: the possession of the Perati - Korça road. Perati was the crucial point, for the importance of the street node and the bridge. Against its salient it was engaged with violence, many times, the 1st cavalry division, right wing of the Greek army corps. At 16:30, Gen. Girotti was forced to ask to blow up the bridge, the line being broken. Bench, envoy on the place just the head of the G.S. for a direct vision of the events, authorized the firing and informed the Commander of army. At 19:10, Geloso anticipated the withdraw order by telephone, to begin from the left.

The VIII Corps was found to having to begin the maneuver in an ugly moment, but the danger that seemed to come from the zone of Perati, that is from the part that had to withdraw with greater slowness in order to avoid the isolation of the left wing, in truth acquired concreteness just in this last side. Just as soon as begun the retrograde movement the communications with *Bari* were interrupted. Therefore passed all the 22nd with a first alarming doubt at mid afternoon: the commander of alpine btg. *Vicenza* reached the position of first jump, informed of being still lacking in contact with the troops of *Bari* and, for against, to have some seen some soldiers he isolated and he confuses (sketch 50). Also all the morning of the 23rd passed without sure news

(51) DS Commander 11th army, f. 026372/op. dated 20.11.1940.

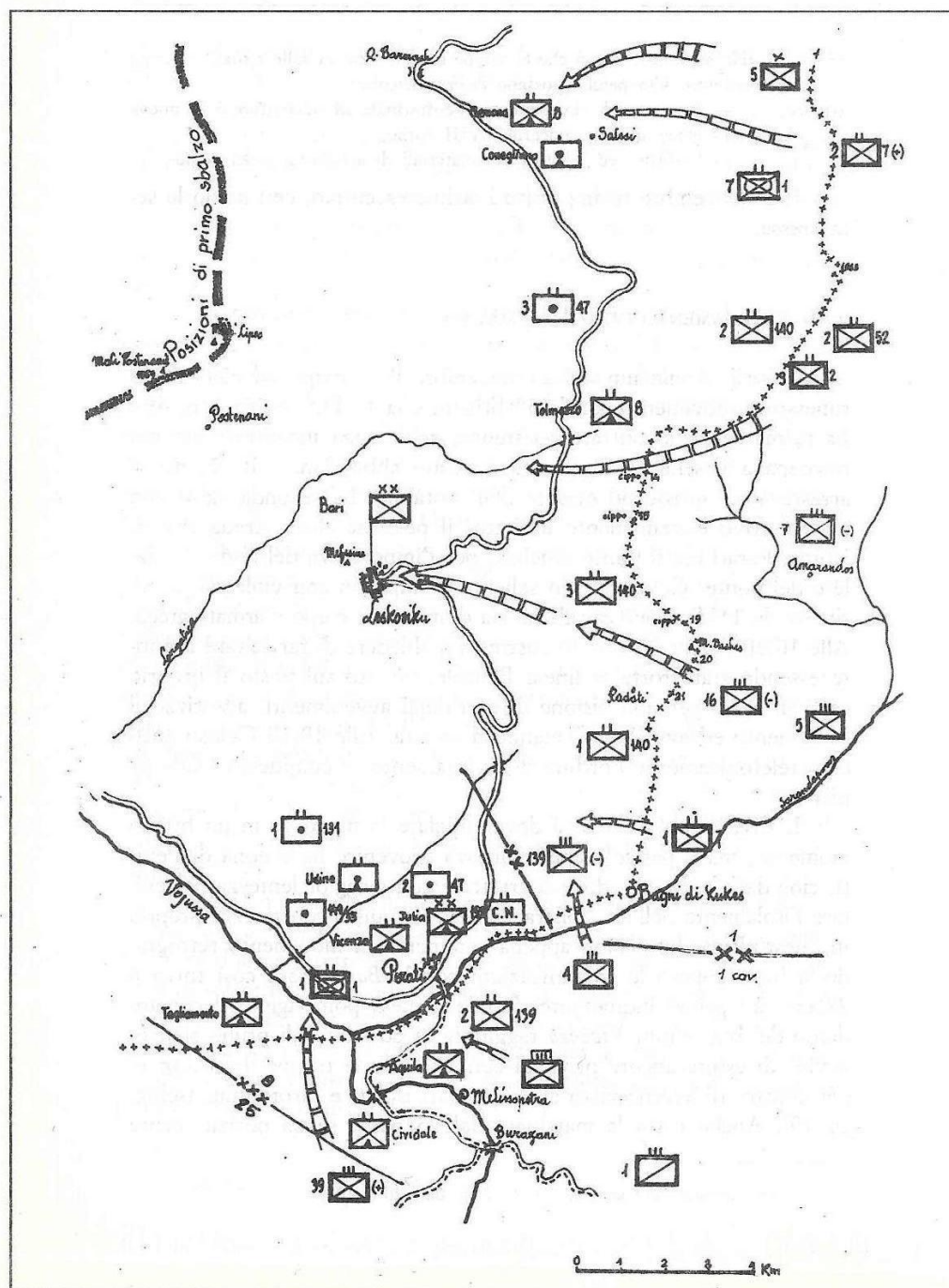
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 288

The beginning with the withdraw of the VIII Army Corps and
the Greek attack (21 – 22 November)

Schizzo n. 49

L'INIZIO DEL RIPIEGAMENTO DELL'VIII CORPO D'ARMATA E L'ATTACCO GRECO (21-22 NOVEMBRE)



SCUZZO II. 20

The map illustrates the Italian front in 1918, showing the Alpine region from the Swiss border to the Gulf of Genoa. The front is divided into several sectors:

- Settore Osum**: Located at the top, near the Swiss border, with the town of Klisna.
- Settore Lenggica**: Below Osum, featuring the town of Aosta.
- Settore Vojska**: Further south, near the town of Torino.
- Settore Nord**: Located near the town of Genova.
- Settore Bureho**: Below Nord, near the town of Genova.
- Settore Dhrino**: Further south, near the town of Genova.
- Settore Litorale**: Located at the bottom, near the Gulf of Genoa.

The map shows the main Alpine front line, with various mountain passes, valleys, and towns. Key locations include Klisna, Aosta, Torino, and Genova. The map also indicates the positions of Italian and Austro-Hungarian forces, with arrows showing the direction of attacks and defenses. A scale bar at the bottom right indicates distances up to 12 km.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

in an increasing restlessness until, making more and more road the hypothesis not to be able to garrison the Lengatica area with the units previewed initially, on the 16th, Gen. Bancale determined to take measures precautionary. To modification of the dispositions already given he ordered, therefore, to Girotti to at first assume the responsibility of the foretold area, locating your battalions withdrawing from Perati (9th alpini, *Cividale* and *Val Tagliamento*) and temporary entrusted to the 41st infantry *Modena*, flowed into the zone the day before - even if lacking in accompanying battery, company mortars and baggage train - the Vojussa area, reserving itself to define the assignment of the 8th alpini, of the 139th and 140th infantry just as soon as known with certainty their conditions.

He was not sure easy to form a precise idea of the situation. To the extreme left the Salvoni tactical group was closing to better the passage in the high valleys Osum and Tomorreces, but those was not known exactly if it were already in place or less and, that is worse, the welding with the XXVI Corps turned out absolutely fictitious. At the moment it was entrusted to two companies of the *Val Fella*, one at Q. Martes and one at Q. Dellenjes, however as a result of brought varying from the 9th army just to the alignment - varying that it withdrew the extreme right, the rgpt. Scrugli of the *Piemonte*, from Q. Martes to m. Velushes - the two localities with Q. Martes and Q. Dellenjes appeared too advanced and consequently they were abandoning. Also the center of the alignment, from Radomit to the Vojussa, was remaining under an unknown quantity still not knowing himself on which units to be able to count. Finally, the extreme right, to south of the Vojussa, on the Nemerçke, being finding itself in front of the large problem of the valley of Suhes, where passed the sector limit with the XXV Corps.

In the late afternoon of the 23rd it was gotten rid that on the *Bari* - whose regiments, remained without ammunitions and exceed the breach limits, had yielded to the Greek resumed offensive - hopes of an immediate reuse as a division did not exist any concrete news still of the *Gemonia*, the *Tolmezzo* and the VII/1st bersaglieres. In definitive, in the night on the 24th the Lengatica area was as soon as supported by a few units and Vojussa valley was defended by a just arrived incomplete regiment from Italy. The first provision taken by the Commander of the army was to send to Klisura the 3rd grenadiers (less a battalion), already recovered from the XXV Corps, with the precise task and exclusive to watch the origins from Osum valley on Klisura. In his turn Bancale circulated the order for the new organization of

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

P.R., entrusting himself a lot, must say it, to the hope that his difficulties escaped the Greeks. And fortunately the yielding of the *Bari* does not turn out has been perceived from the adversary, on whose rapidity of movement, to honor the truth, was unavoidable that they weighed negatively the large problems of refueling. In this circumstance, as already in other before and successive then, a situation was taken place in which the dangerous consequences of the possible one to realize a created threat by force of events clearly were estimated from the Italian Commanders, than - null being able to oppose, if not to preview a regression, on better positions - they endured the psychological conditioning of the fact. In the same time, the threat could very well remain to the state potential and not to assume immediate consistency, but to find clarification after some days of unstable equilibrium; when that is the Greeks had decided to cautiously cross the threshold of the opened wide door.

The Greek II Corps received the new directives of the High supreme command only on the 25th: it had to advance along the Premeti-Berat director coming down the valley of the Vojussa and the Osum and holding as a base of operations the Erseke-Leskoviku feature. For such task it was reinforced from one brigade of cavalry of formation (constituted also with yielded units from K group), from the division of cavalry and then from the 11th infantry division. We will see to what turns out will lead this movement.

The 24th, things readjusted for the army corps Bancale: in the early afternoon arrived the 3rd grenadiers, later the 8th alpine succeeded to communicate that, it remained isolated to north of Leskoviku and having acquitted the protective task the withdraw of the forces of Q. Bafmash, of initiative it had been redeemed and it reached Frasherri, deploying the battalions *Tolmezzo* and *Gemona* from Q. Martes to Q. Dellenjes. With the 8th alpine there were also the III/47° artillery, remained with six pieces, and the *Conegliano* group reduced to one battery.

Rather tried and for than more hardly veteran from ulterior a hard blow (52), the *Julia* was offered on three fields: the 8th alpine with four battalions (the three organic plus the *Val Tagliamento*), the 9th with three battalions

(52) the 20th an enemy aerial incursion to lowest height on Premeti had provoked serious damages to the divisional logistic apparatus, or better to its remains, inasmuch as already a lot had been lost to Ersekë. Between died and hurt 8 officials and 387 non-commissioned officers and troop were available. They were destroyed: good part of the Command and the General Quarters, 3 field hospitals, 2 subsistence nuclei, the post office, a ammunition depot, 17 shacks with great part of the material of the regiments.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

(two organic plus the *Val Felta*); the tactical group De Martino with two battalions: and the VII/1° bersaglieres (sketch n. 51).

The arraignment was a very laborious one. While they were still in the course of movement in order to reach the positions, appeared on all the front the advance elements is followed by the first groups of the Greek II Corps. It is necessary convene that the Greek exploratory activity more than once, overwhelmed, with its aggressiveness, the pauses emerging in the distribution of the orders. But, probably, the intermingling of our battalions and of the companies even had at least a favorable aspect: a deceptive picture in our real consistency contributed to supply to the opposing intelligence. Of the rest, also from Italian side the reconstruction of the enemy situation met analogous difficulties.

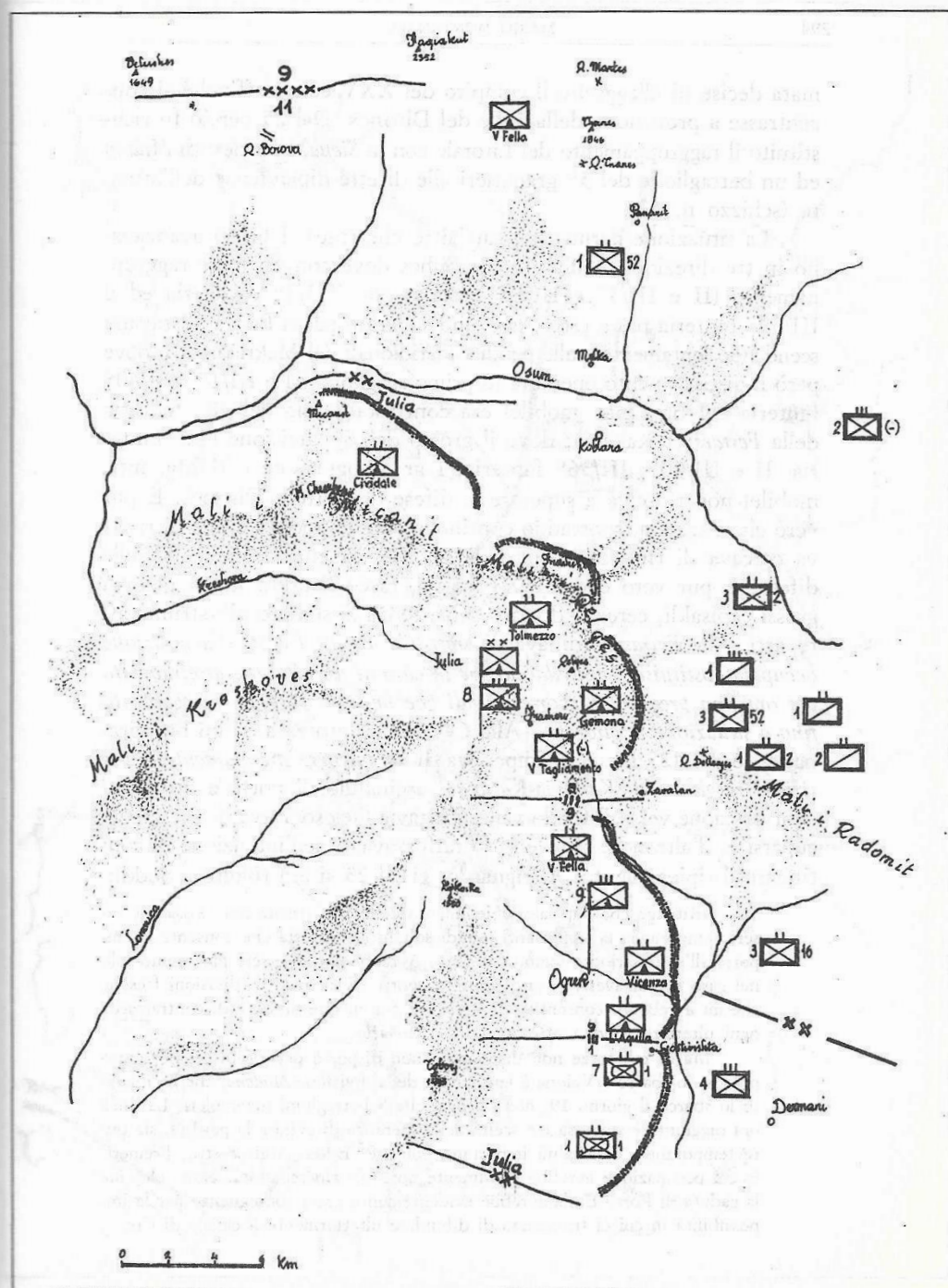
The other hurting point was constituted from the welding with the XXV army corps. It had also this begun the withdrawn in the night of the 22nd, breaking off contact with some hard work: the 2nd and 8th Greek I.D. for more days insisted wherever and without giving truce is engaging the front of the units online is infiltrating patrols in the wide meshes of the defense. For reached the withdraw of the right of the VIII Corps it left discovered the access way to the val Suhes and, worse, it threatened the flank of the *Fenara* and the winding of the *Centauro*, still near Delvinaki. Realized in some way the uncoupling, the new device introduced a series of difficulties.

To part the deployment all to put into effect, the bottom problem consisted in tying in some way the *Fenara*, that to the maximum it could push until to the rocks of Makrikambos (53), with the val Suhes. For the moment a group lancers of *Aosta* was carried to the outlet of val Suhes, in connection with the tactical group Egizj. From the opposite part, on the coast, in the night of the 23rd the Greeks carried out a disembarkation in the bays of Butrinto and Filia. Account was be a matter little of what, quickly resolved with the capture of a hundred of prisoners and the re-embarcation of the others to work of the *Siena* (54), but the Commander of the army

(53) Keep in mind the Makrikambos denomination comprised the whole of the Bureto is the group isolated to east south of Panaja pass. And likewise that - as for other referenced mountain - the name Bureto regarded all the unitary whole, but it specifically designated to the greater southern summit (1488 m.) and 1728 m. to the height of Libohovo.

(54) The operation had been organized by the Commander of Corfù. The incursion, of approximately 200 men, had to reach the shoreline of Butrinto, to act against the right flank of the *Siena* and to facilitate a push for the north from Kalamas. This last one did not have place and the detachment, lacking in effective intrinsic force, lost the two thirds part of its effectives.

LA SITUAZIONE A NORD DELLA VOJUSSA IL 26 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

decided to lighten the task of the XXV Corps so that it was concentrated to protection of the valley of the Dhrinos. From the 25th therefore the grouping of the Litorale with the *Siena*, the lancers of *Milano* and a battalion of the 3rd grenadiers under the direct command of the army was reconstituted (sketch n. 52).

The situation was remaining anything but rose-colored. The Greeks were advancing in three directions: in the high Suhes valley they where with a strong grouping (II and III/3rd and II/39th infantry with the I/3rd cavalry and the III/39th infantry more to back) had exceeded Panaja pass and was coming down slowly; on the southern slopes of the Makrikambos, where but first the operating detachment in groups (II and III/15th and I/40th infantry and the mobile mtr. bdg.) was opposed by the 48th infantry of the *Ferrara*; at Kakavia, where the bulk of the 8th division (42nd infantry, II and III/40th, III/36th infantry, the recognition gr. and II mobile mtr. bdg.) did not succeed to exceed the defense of the Dhrinos area. And also true that the army, moving continuously the little pawns of reserve tried to consolidate here and there the slackening of rings of the defense. It is also true that the XXV Corps, collecting itself in a pair of large bench marks, tried to give consistency to the more and more shabby units. To the *Ferrara* he ordered "*to resist at all costs. The occupied position constitutes bench mark also in case of an ulterior regression for an hour not previewed. It is necessary therefore that nobody speaks about withdraw until the situation improved*". To the *Centauro*, reinforced from a grenadiers bdg. and the 42nd infantry, imposed "*to maintain the positions of Kakavia-Katuna courageous reached*", checking by night and by day every irruption towards the bottom of the valley. However Geloso had of that to worry and, however, the events strengthened it in the intention to continue the withdraw. With regard to that, he already on the 23rd had addressed to Soddu:

"I think that it puts into effect the alignment of the 11th Army cannot that being temporary and it represents therefore only a pause that allow to impose to the adversary a time of arrest. It could have been maintained only in the case in which you had been able at once to decide of a pair of fresh divisions that would have allow me to demolish with unitary action of counterattack every ulterior offensive desire of the adversary.

But of such forces I do not decide and I will not arrange in order much time, much more than the disembarkation at Valona it is slowest: of the *Modena* division, that on the 19th has begun disembarkation, I do not have today 5 incomplete battalions. The line reached now has been by me chosen in the hope to avoid the loss, is also temporary, of important localities like P. Edda, Argirocastro, Premeti, whose occupation would have sure remarkable repercussions. Not only, but the fall of Port Edda would evidently have serious consequences for the impossibility in which we will find ourselves to defend further the channel of Corfù.

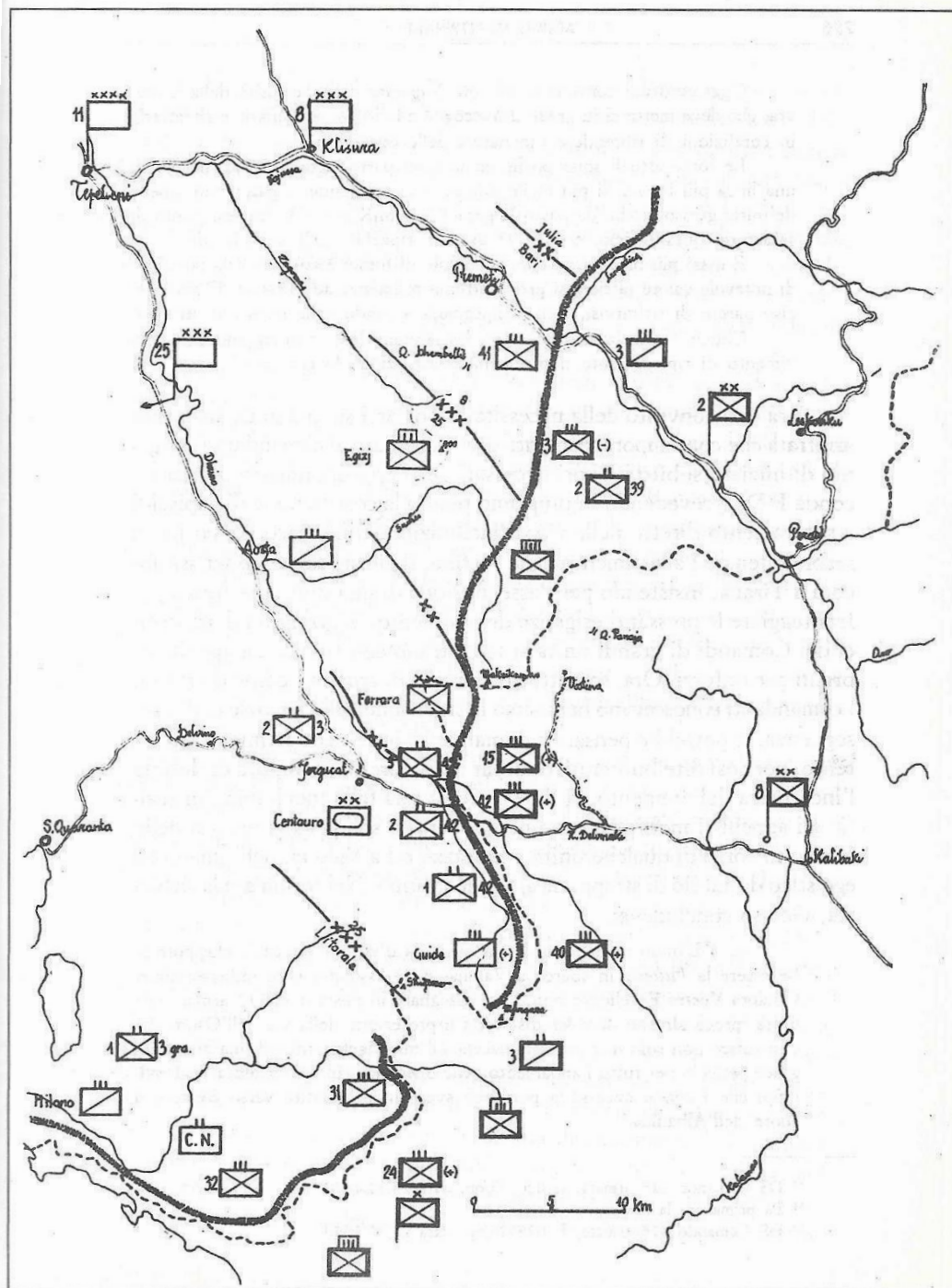
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 295

The situation at the Epirus frontier 26 November

Schizzo n. 52

LA SITUAZIONE ALLA FRONTIERA EPIROTA IL 26 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Today but such considerations are exceeded from the necessities of the maneuver, that it must put to us in a position to collecting the forces, reordering them and to return them to conditions for resuming the initiative of the operations.

The forces put into effect are few and in great part worn out: one is prevailed therefore short line, than easier defense. To that he answers, to me it seems, that one defined, in a grand way, from the pass Logora - Tepeleni-Klisura-Q. Martes, welding point, this last one, with the 9th Army, brought back in the attached transparency.

He is very brief; he concurs economies of forces; is constituted from positions of remarkable tactical value; resistance is lend to the bitter end. It is my precise to seem to draw myself back, without to engage itself to depth on the positions putting them into effect.

I ask yours authorization, leaving me free to resume the movement of withdraw not just situation council" (55).

Therefore he was convinced of the necessity to carry himself to a line still more rear that at the same time had ordered to the commander of the engineers to begin at once the first the necessary work for the preparation of a second P.D., previewing the constitution of bench marks to direct obstruction of the more dangerous ways of facilitation and in according to time a preparation of curtains. The following day still wrote to Tirana, insisting for the allocation of one fresh division in order to face the pressing requirements of the moment. Skimming the per diem histories with the Commanders of major unit they are met with frequency appealed viciously for reinforces. Now, above all to the level of Army and Army corps, the commanders knew the situation very well of the rears and, consequently, he could be thought next to questions inspired essentially to the attempt, so to bureaucratic speak, to make without a shadow of doubt to observe the uncertainty of the moment and the danger of that makes it unavoidable; in truth, the appeals were multiplied just as soon as the news of the disembarkation in course of some units were scattered at Durazzo or Valona, in the human and egoistic desire to tear it to the "contenders". In formulating the demand, Geloso concluded:

"(...) the immediate dispatch of a second fresh division (56), that could be the *Pusteria* in disembarkation at Valona, to me is absolutely indispensable. In case Your Excellence cannot assign to the 11th Army proper such unit, I ask at least of wanting to locate it to protection of the way of Osum that constitutes not only a serious threat on my left flank, but also a serious danger for all the course of the operations in consequence of the developments that the opposing action could have in depth towards Berat and the heart of Albania"(57).

(55) DS Commando 11th Army, f. 026483/op. dated 23.11.1940.

(56) First it was the *Modena*.

(57) DS Commando 11th Army, f. 026526/op. dated 24.11.1940

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

The Supreme Commander then went to Tepeleni, where had moved the Commander of the 11th Army, in order to discuss about the state of the things. The retrograde movement from the positions of beyond border could tell by now completed and the situation could therefore be characterized: continuous locked contact and strong pressure between Vojussa and Dhrinos; dangerous rarefaction of troops on all the resistance position, whose development caught up the 120 km; absolutely incomplete defense in correspondence of the line of facilitation of the Osum, where the Greeks went visibly collecting forces in order to attack to the joint between the two Armies, with Berat as the objective.

Soddu recognized the effective gravity of the perspectives and assigned, the *Pusteria* to the 11th Army. With this division, of which they were disembarked only the Command of the 7th alpine and the *Feltre* and *Cadore* bdg., the III Corps had to supply to the obstruction of the direction of Osum and to the joint with the 9th Army. In exchange Gen. Bench had to yield the 3rd grenadiers (order already given), the 41st infantry and the other elements of the *Modena* that had to gather with the rest of the division in val Dhrinos, and finally the *Bari* which, already withdrawn from the line, had to be moved to the north of Klisura in order to reorganize themselves. In short, the army came to assume the following ordering: XXV Corps, with the *Ferrara* and *Modena* I.D. and the *Centauro* A.D.; VIII Corps, with the *Julia* and *Pusteria* alp. D.; *Siena* I.D., to the directed command, in the front; *Bari* D.I. in reserve.

On the paper these troops could also be considered sufficient, but where mind to the usury of the old divisions is placed and to the incompleteness of those new arrived will appear as any problem could quickly become worrisome. Moreover, if with the taken decision the connection with the 9th Army could be said guaranteed, at least to short expiration, that one between VIII and XXV Corps was still on the verge of collapse. It ran between the valleys of Vojussa and Dhrinos (sketch 53) in a natural atmosphere that, if to a first superficial examination it did not seem to demand particular attention, in effects perhaps constituted the more delicate point of the entire front of the 11th Army, is in the moment in issue is and still more after that. Between the two parallels ridges of Dhembel-Nemerçke to east and Strakavec-Lunxheries to the West it runs the tectonic furrow of the high Suhes valley and the Zagorias valley for a length of fifty kilometers, who's southern turn is Q. Panaja, occupied by the Greeks without the much effort on 24 November. The two shoulders of the furrow - both practicable on the hump, round - concur to come down on Premeti

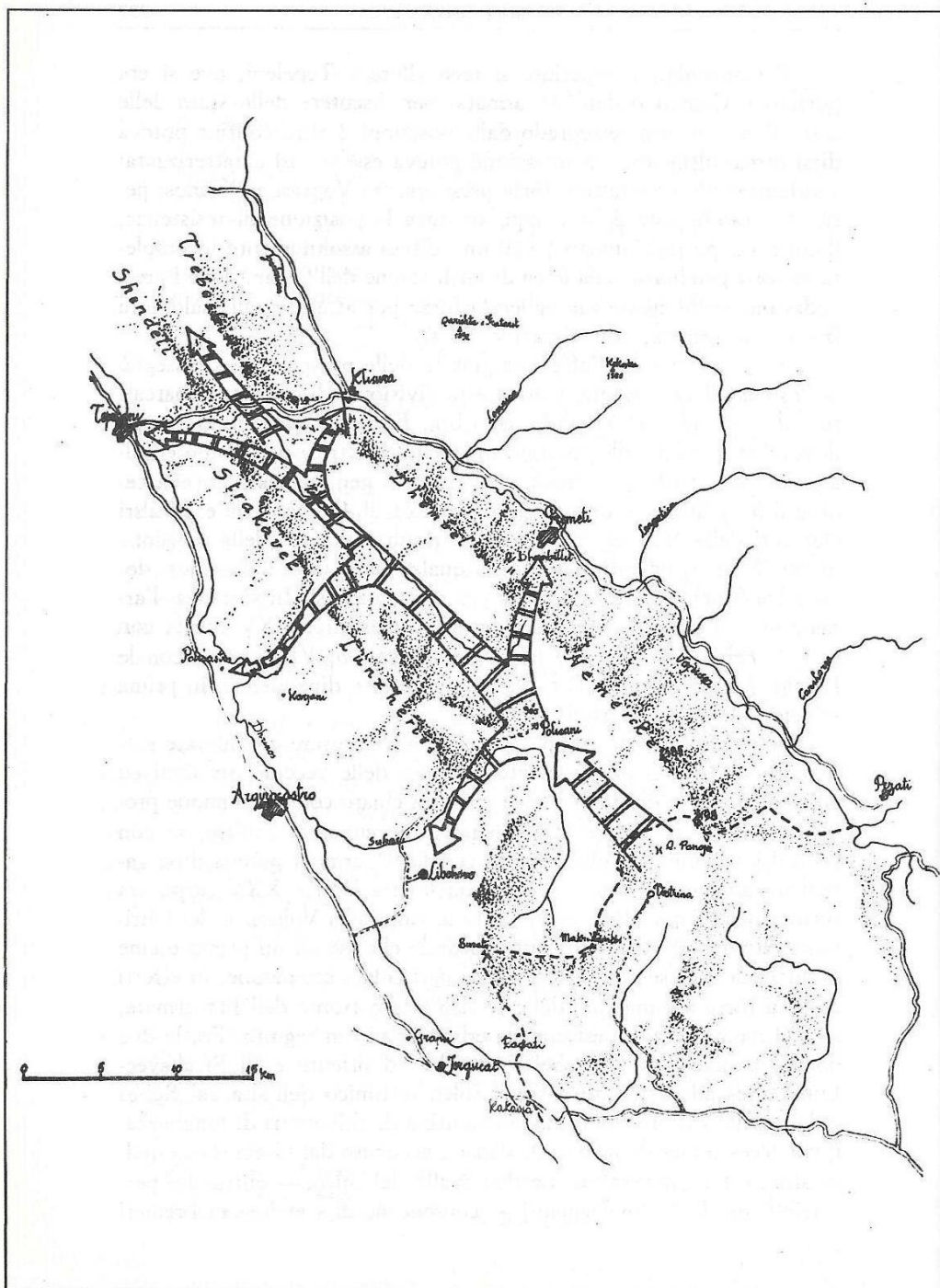
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 298

The Suhes-Zagorias furrow and Greek operating possibilities

Schizzo n. 53

IL SOLCO SUHES-ZAGORIAS E LE POSSIBILITÀ OPERATIVE GRECHE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

on one side and on Libohovo and Policastro from the other. The Zagorias valley, then, ending up to north on the Vojussa with a conoid width of defecation, allows, as much as you like, of turning towards Tepeleni or Klisura, or to continue between Shendeli and Trebeshines. In the furrow in argument, 900 m. height is the center of figure from which they leave muleteer towards all the cardinal points. The importance to block in some way is therefore obvious the possibilities that they were offered the Greek advance. Also because the region was the element of welding, very more than division, between guiding operating the Argirocastro- Valona and Premeti-Berat. To 900 m. height had been sent, since from 23 November, a small detachment under the orders of Major Egizj. The Greeks, on the other hand they, were themselves point out on the height of Suhes valley on 24 November. They had not had large difficulties to exceed the opposite resistances from the Albanian *Grammos* battalion and therefore they had been about themselves to come down in the valley, but without much freedom from prejudice: probably because in that zone the sector limit between the 2nd and 8th I.D. ran also and, as always it happens, the marginal efforts cover, at least initially, minor importance. On the 27th the Greeks occupied the positions of 900 m, height, and also those grip dominating the Bidan, separating in such a way the Suhes valley from that one of the Zagorias.

At first Geloso thought to counterattack delivered by elements of both army corps, but then, not considering such decisive action, was oriented towards a serious decision:

"The situation of the 11th Army - he wrote to the Armed forces high command - today has considerably been aggravated. The enemy chases on the entire line and exercises strong pressure on the joint of the two army corps, where the units have yielded.

The troops are for the greater part tired. The Albanian units do not give to any confidence of ulterior resistance (the *Dajti* bdg. this morning have surrendered to the enemy nearly without to fight). Lack of ammunitions on the line of the fire. The deficiency of quadrupeds - in spite of all it has, in my possibilities, tried for down play – the considerably repercussions on the possibilities of a organic maneuver and durable effects.

The rhythm of affluence of the *Pusteria* division does not guarantee the employment that to nibble, with serious damage for its efficiency of major unit.

Of forefront to such situation I have decided to withdraw on the line Port Palermo-Kurvelesh-river right side Vojussa-Klisura-Kjarista-Potomit-Q. Kualibardhe (doubling the Tepeleni-Klisura feature), line that I will catch up for times succeeded, beginning this night the movement with the right wing currently the most advanced "(58)

(58) DS Commando 11th army, f. 026698/op, dated 27.11,1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Immediately Soddu objected that such provision would have had serious repercussions of political character and suggested to consider the convenience to limit the regression on the line Premeti - Argirocastro- Delvino-Santi Quaranta. The retort of Geloso was clean:

"The decision to withdraw my army put into effect from position of resistance on line P. Palermo Tepeleni-Klisura-Q. Kualibardhe has been from taken by me after a short examination of the estimated elements of the situation, in relationship to:

- to the serious threat - still in action - of which to my 026698 yesterday;
- to the insufficient residual efficiency of some major unit, today only such in name, and that they fight uninterruptedly from 28 October;
- to the persuasion that the forces you assigned to me, also in the conspicuous complex, they could not, for their slow rhythm and the affluence modalities, being employed in their organic compactness, since the situation would demand;
- to the most deficient note logistic organization, consequently of which the units online become scarce of all, and often also of ammunition and rations;
- to the convincement that also the *Pusteria* division, on whose employment I counted a lot, pulverize any front to the chasing necessities of having plug and to react in numerous points of the front, in order to assure of integrity.

It is the decision therefore – my own - weighted and cold of the commander who, of forefront to the two solutions that the problem allowed to him - to hold at all costs cobble together and clearing, or to come unhooked himself from the opposing pressure in order to withdraw on a new position that allows him to hold with little and reordering and reorganizing the own forces, in great part most tired and lacking in organic ties - chooses this last which most suitable one to allow him to withdraw from the line the units that more have been tried.

I have also weighted the consequences of the abandonment of the wide offensive outlet, today in our hands, but given the situation puts into effect think it is easier to reconquer it with organic units after one good organization, than not to be obstinate itself to maintain it now with reduced and tired forces.

I have made abstraction therefore from whichever consideration of political order since think that little must count in the glare of the public opinion the loss, is also painful, of some inhabited centers, of free front to the most serious repercussion than a military reverse that seriously jeopardize the last aim which it must be stretched, that it is that one of soon holding in a position to resuming the offensive action.

It is for that, also obeying to the orders of that Command (Your 1220f.op.), rest also always in the persuasion that, also of all the favorable one, like I hope, the outcome of the tidy actions of

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

counterattack and while I write in course, it convene under every care to withdraw the 11th Army on the position which I have above pointed out, already basted: withdraw that would gradually happen for the following phase, while the strengthening work ordered continue with chasing rhythm

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

I make also to find that the position suggested to me on the Edda-Delvino-Argirocastro- Port Premeti line is very weak in the valley of Dhrinos ^{"(59)}.

Soddu, to Tirana, was not felt to guarantee the decision and replied at once:

"(...) considered arrivals in course *Pusteria* and three black shirt battalions, I too much judge serious communication for military and political repercussions stop ask again that every effort and sacrifice in order to cover the line Santi Quaranta-Delvino - Argirocastro-Premeti"⁽⁶⁰⁾.

Therefore he informed the under-secretary of the S.M.R.E., Roatta, and thought opportune to address to Geloso a personal letter from which, also finding the will to resist, was transparent a sure anguish and a strongly uncertainty of the front to chasing of the events and the situation that delineated⁽⁶¹⁾. The commander of the 11th Army had to obey:

"Thank you for information about the arrival of new troops stop we will hold hard executing your order stop to General Scuero I have made to state most serious deficiency services that arrive even lack I say lack ammunitions and provisions which it is necessary most urgent shelter"⁽⁶²⁾.

In any case the things got worse. In a long report held at Klisura, Bancale illustrated to Geloso much he had written a few hours before circa the spirit of the units, having taken as an example the *Julia* - than, between parenthesis it was the only complete division - the commander of which it had put in evidence "*a true and just exhaustion of the officials and the troop, whose manifestations are worrisome for the war efficiency*".

In his presentation Bancale concluded:

"(...) I have already said, to You Excellency, that for me the logistic problem exceeds whichever by far others; I have even added that to new battalions I prefer baggage train. I am insisting, unfortunately in vain, for air escort of provisions and of ammunitions⁽⁶³⁾ for the *Julia* division, I ask therefore to consider

(59) DS Commander 11th army, f. 026754/op. dated 28.11.1940.

(60) DSCSFAA, tele 1243/op. dated 28.1.1.1940.

(61) Testimony of Gen. Geloso.

(62) DS Commando 11th Army, tele 026756/op. dated 28.11.1940. Gen. Scuero was the Senior F.A.A. Superintendent.

(63) Aerial supply introduced the twofold disadvantage of often the negative atmospheric conditions and the deficient availability of equipments for the airborne drop, for which every time it was necessary to recover the equipments in issue and to send back them at once to Tirana for their reuse.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

if it is not the case to give the precedence as well as in the disembarks how much in the transports to the introduction of baggage train ".⁽⁶⁴⁾

If the VIII Corps had series difficulty, the XXV tried not to lose its point of support on the Bureto, to whose southern slopes the *Ferrara* was fighting itself tirelessly. The Gen. C. Rossi had modified slightly the disposition. The *Ferrara* to north of the Dhrinos and the *Centauro* to south, with a containment position to the height of Dervicani. The *Modena* had gradually to replace the worn out *Ferrara* using its own organic units (for the moment II and III/42nd), the 3rd grenadiers (for the moment only the II bdg.) and alpine bdg. the *Bolzano*, head arrived. To substitution carried out on specific order of the army corps, the *Ferrara* had to be collected to back of the containment position and to be completed with four battalions of complements of previewed transport from Italy via aircraft. The *Centauro* continued to garrison the most reduced right field that with the contribution of cp. machine-gunners from position and 68th black shirt btg. and to cure the connection with the *Siena*, that it was withdrawing in order to correct the excessive salient formed from the front. The rearrangement very was set up, but in the end could not be carried, is for the Greek attacks to m. Bureto is because Gen. Gloria, commander of the *Modena*, remained hurt. The Bureto, after that the block relief of the Makrikambos had fallen because of the enemy penetration in the Suhes valley, had become the disheartened pillar which it would have been easy for the Greeks to bring down on Libohovo, that is on the rear of the army corps, along the lowland Suhes valley or eradicating the hinge of Radati.

"The Italian Commander - the Greek report says - in organizing the defense of the eastern access of the pass [of Kakavia] had gravitated with the forces on the massive mounts of Burato and in particular on the spur of h. 669 [Radati], that was powerfully fortified and garrisoned by three mountain battalions".⁽⁶⁵⁾

In truth on the Bureto there were the leftovers of the *Ferrara* and only on the 30th entered in action the *Bolzano*. From the Greek side, on the 26th had arrived the 3rd I. D. with the 6th and 12th infantry, which three battalions of the 40th infantry and the recognition group from the Tsakalotos detachment joined to others, already of 8th I.D. the Greek effort therefore was exercised: in valley

(64) DS Command VIII Corps, f. 1/362 op. dated 28.11.1940.

(65) Greek S.M.E., op, cit, vol. III, pag. 92.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Suhes from the 2nd I.D., to north of Dhrinos from the 8th I.D. and to south of the water course from the 3rd I.D.

In the area of the shoreline the enemy offensive still had not been manifested fully and therefore the withdraw of the *Siena* happened without excessive breathlessness. But it was suffering. On the 28th, in communicating the attainment of the t. Pavla, the commander of the division signaled laconically "*troops exhausted*", but in the same evening an further element of doubt arrived to the army on the solidity of the unit (66). Consequently Geloso arranged the preventive organization of the defensive new position, than from m. Velushes (welding with the 9th Army) had to follow the alignment Q. Kualibarde-slopes southeast of the Qarishta-Shes i Mal (the northern tip of the ridge of the Dhembel)-m. Golico (northern tip of the Strakavec)-Kurvelesh-t. Borshj and Iv evacuation of the indispensable and heavier materials. Moreover the balance possession of the pass of Murzines, that places in communication the Dhrinos valley with Delvino and Santi Quaranta, to the case of the XXV Corps, and the allocation of the responsibility of the Zagorias valley to the VIII Corps, while the XXV would have supplied to block the incidences from right valley in that one of the Dhrinos. Then he decided on the concentration of the *Bari* at Berat and the withdrawal of the Albanian battalions from the line for their state of moral depression.

The evening of the 29th to the Army Commander had arrived the following news: on the front of the VIII Corps the Greeks with another violent effort were successful to get hold of Viniahu and the ridge of Malibardhe, but they had been rejected by the hard counter-assault of the *Julia* in the zone of m. Qelqes-Fraseri; in Suhes valley the *Val Natisone* bgt. did not succeed to prevent the enemy affirmation in the zone of q. 900; in the Dhrinos valley had fallen an important point of m. Bureto, provoking therefore one particularly serious situation at the left flank of the *Ferrara*, such to threaten to reverse all the alignment of the XXV Corps. In these conditions Geloso hesitated. For a retrograde movement he had need or of the absence of the opposing pressure or of a sure hinge on which being based in order to complete one partial turn of the right. The first condition unfortunately depended essentially on the enemy; the second one, instead, could and however it *had* to be

(66) A classified communication, that specified, among other things: "*Troop Moral Siena division somewhat shaken after withdraw last night. Soldiers 31st and 32nd infantry worn, tired, nearly barefoot, is not in degree to resist enemy in order much of the time. 32nd Infantry conditions is found getting worse*" (Per diem history 11th Army, 28 November)

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

realized. Already Vercellino, that it had analogous worries for the connection with the 11th Army, had cleared the situation. The completed recognitions in fact had indicated the convenience to define the joint between the two armed at Q. Martes, so as to give to the 9th Army the control of the penetration lines towards val. Tomorreces and to entrust to the 11th Army the control of those adducing to the Osum. Therefore Vercellino had decided, for his part, the connection with the *Julia* at Q. Martes and the III btg. of the Finance Guard in the Gostanka region (defensive franking of the Q. Martes - Q. Kualibardhe obstruction). The order reached the Commander of the 11th Army, who had been sent for information, only the 30th and this explains the uncertainty of some days. However later to him Geloso could subdivide the Osum- Tomorreces area into two spheres of competence: one, the Osum area, remained assigned to Lt. Col. Salvoni with the units of the Albanian Police officer, Financial police and volunteer located in the zone, to the command of the VIII Corps and attached to the *Pusteria*; the other, the Tomorreces area, was passed to the 9th Army.

But it was destiny that the joints had to always to creak. In the late evening of the same 30 November the VIII Corps signaled that the cp. of the *Val. Fella* located at Q. Martes, was attacked by preponderant forces (was be a matter of the III/30th infantry, pertaining to the Papacostantino detachment) during a violent torments, had to withdraw on m. Faqiakuqit (q. 2,352), southern spur of the Ostravice; that the 41st infantry of the *Modena* had yielded of crash, but, thanks on the credit side to Greek inertia, had been possible to reorder it to the better and to take back the positions left; that in the Zagorias valley the *Val. Natisone* had been rejected, but with the aid of the *Belluno* btg. the new Pizzi battle group, destined to assume the defense of the zone, was deploying. To the West the *Siena* had completed another step back, carrying on the right river of the Vistritsa (sketch n. 54). Q. Murzihes constituted welding point between the Litorale battle group and the XXV Corps. The decision to withdraw by now for Geloso was irrevocable. Answering to the further invite to remain in place, he wrote a long letter to Soddu:

"I confirm my telegram n. 026924 of which approximately my definitive understanding. Naturally the withdraw maneuver cannot be completed some in a single jump nor quickly, much more that the VIII Corps is always violently engaged, the hinge of the maneuver, and does not allow to avoid during actions understood in order to avoid that the maneuver provokes a worsening situations.

I have already fallen back the *Siena* division on the line of the Vistrica that covers

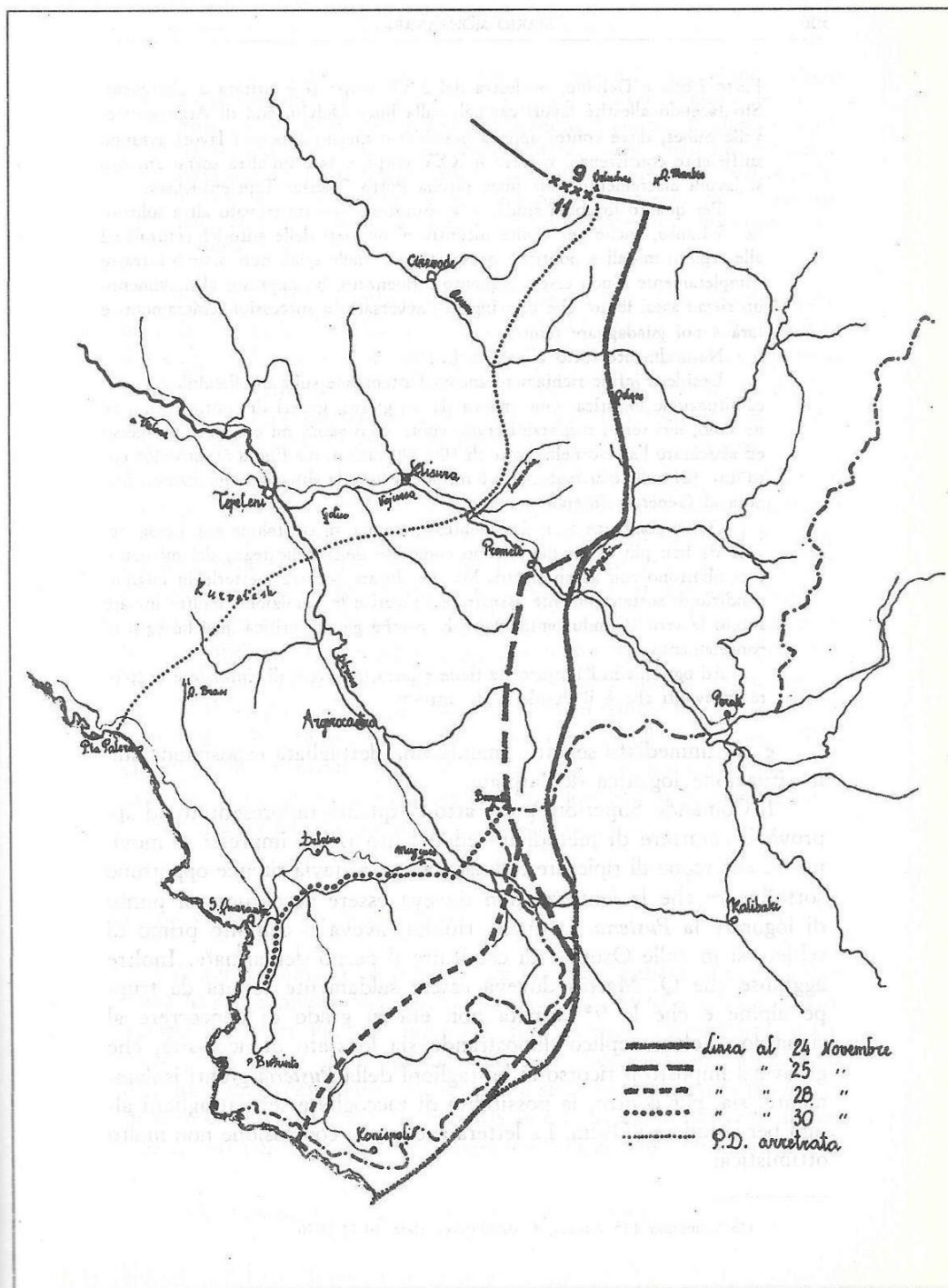
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 305

The 11th Army withdraw of the from the 24 to 30 November

Schizzo n. 54

IL RIPIEGAMENTO DELL'11^a ARMATA DEL 24 AL 30 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Port Edda and Delvino; the right of the XXV Corps has been withdrawn to Giorguçat. I am making to prepare field works on the line Delvino-south of Argirocastrovalle Suhes, where consider, as soon as possible or best hasty works will have sufficient consistency, to retire the XXV Corps and to make another pause. While last is worked actively on the line Port Palermo Tepeleni-Klisura.

For how much I have studied the situation I have not found another solution. Only, even in order to come to encounter desires of the central authorities and to the moral and political reasons, you look on to me, from which I could not somewhat separate and completely not to be influenced, have fixed firmly to the movement at a very slow rhythm, that will force the adversary to successes alignments and will make us earn time.

Naturally all the coast (...).

I finally wish to still draw attention on the intolerable and chaotic logistic situation: wine lacks for six days; any kinds of comfort are not had; yesterday evening the magazines were empty: I say *empty*; I had been promised and assured the arrival in the night of 100,000 rations but until to this moment (hours 12) null has arrived; also the ammunitions situation is ultra deficient, well known to the General Intendente.

Here it is fought very hard; the troops, of which some do not have rest for well more than a month, are comprised of the delicacy of the moment and fight with fury. But in order to last it is necessary to put them in better conditions: substantially to assure the provisions and ammunitions; moreover to send at once "the series of winter clothes, since already verification some cases of freezing.

In any case the 11th Army it holds and it will hold, in wait to resume the push ahead that in its desire of all"⁽⁶⁷⁾

and, to immediate continuation, sent a detailed exposure on the logistic situation of the army.

The Comando Superiore action taken for how much represented and approved of the character of methodically and the slow rhythm imparted to the movement in order to withdraw tidily, however he thought opportune to emphasize that the slowness did not have to be emphasized to the point to wear away the *Pusteria*, which, re-united, had the first task of deploying in the Osum valley and to constitute the hinge of the army. Moreover he added that Q. Martes had to be held securely by mountain troops and that the 9th Army was not in a position to concurring with this respect. Geloso replied demonstrating both the state of necessity, than the resource to the battalions of the *Pusteria* had arrived isolated, and against, the possibility to collect six mountain battalions in order to close the Osum. The letter had a not very optimistic conclusion:

67) DS Comando 11th Armata, f. 026935/op, date 30/11/1940

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"(...) In synthesis: I repeat that on the entire front of the army both from some days fighting, and is still fought, with high reactive spirit and arrogant value; but I cannot hide that of adequate consisting reserves in my hand the logistic situation and, the lack delicacy guiding of attack of the adversary serious converge much to render the much serious situation, that will be faced by all means, but that it cannot improve considerably if with a transfusion that does not heavily reinforce the organic"⁽⁶⁸⁾.

For three days the combats were followed with alternate vicissitudes in the high valleys of the Dhrinos. While the 42nd infantry of the *Modena* was arranged along the positions of border and behind it reordered the 48th infantry, the *Centauro* and the II/3rd grenadiers (reduced to 36 men), the Solinas grouping and the 47th infantry they still faced the adversary. On 30 November a violent attack against the 47th provoked a crisis moment. Col. Trizio then re-united all the available units in a formation and after to have them encouraged the movements to the counter assault, falling nearly at once hit mortally from one mortar chip. Temporary the enemy was arrested. On 1 December was the time of the *Bolzano* to take part: in means to rain, icy wind and sleet, the action of alpine, slow, hard, unstoppable, re-establish in the afternoon the situation on the Bureto. On 2 December the 11th Army circulated the warning for ulterior the partial regression of the XXV Corps and the Litorale Battlegroup. The operation was decided for the night on the 5th. It was time because the 3rd, on the right of the *Centauro*, Greeks succeeded to occupy Q. Murzines and the line of the XXV Corps came to form a dangerous salient, that its cancellation from the West or east had to be painfully corrected.

7. THE MUSSOLINI-BADOGLIO CRISIS.

To this point it is necessary to step back and to consider as the development of the operations had been seen at Tirana, to the Comando Superiore Albania Armed Forces, and known to Rome, Palazzo Venezia and the Comando Supremo. Soddu had assumed the direction of the campaign with an optimism that attenuated much of ahead to the truth. In classified way it had been put to the current also of comments collected "in the military atmosphere of the territory of Premeti"

68) DS Comando 11th army, f. 027109/op. dated 2.12.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

(in short, in the within of the *Ciamuria* army corps) on the reasons of the failure ⁽⁶⁹⁾. These were characterized in the deficient political action: it had come to lack that uprising in Greece directed to overthrow the Metaxas government who – according to the diffused conviction in all, Albanian included - had to burst to continuation of our advance. In the embryonic organization: the absence of the most elementary measures in all the fields had been found; the state of the roadways and the bridges was painful with serious repercussions on the transit of the convoys; the telegraphic communications did not give any confidence because of the frequent interruptions due to the bad weather and bad the conditions of the material; the health service, Vojussa valley, *"it has been learns to the necessities for defect of means and ambulances and that one of the commissariat all lacked"*. In the devoid vision of the military action: *"it was much diffused conviction in the Commands and the troops that the military action would have been easy and rich of immediate successes, that the adversary would have been taken by surprise and easy swept up"*, forecasts clearly refutation from the facts.

All this Soddu had well understood, therefore as a lot of the alarmed astonishment was not astonished of the two new commanders of the Armies in the first examination of their war instrument to which they were entrusted. It has been seen, in fact, like the picture supplied to the S.M.R.E. it was lacking in periphrasis and it did not mask the fear that the operating developments could impose a general withdraw. But there is something more. Mussolini seemed to think that the Greek problem was started on a solution.

Gen. Armellini wrote on 14 November:

"This morning I have gone from the Duce for the bulletin (...). Then have spoken about the situation in Greece and of the shipment of reinforcements. He has manifested his thought to me: "I see the action - he has said to me with security - in four phases: 1st phase, to complete the transport of the divisions *Modena* and *Tridentina*, suspending therefore the movement of the men alone; 2nd phase, transport of material and motor vehicles; 3rd phase, to complete the deployment; 4th phase, to attack what this will be able to happen before December - in order to reach the objectives of Prevesa and Arta". It thought evidently close to 5 December!

It will be another program to abandon. The General Staff of the R. Army previews in fact must transport, in order to complete the program previously studied: 200 thousand men, 40 thousand mules, 7,700 motor vehicles and 210 thousand tons of material. Without of that he will continue himself to make of the actions little by little..." ⁽⁷⁰⁾.

69) DSCSFAA, Memorandum s.n. dated 12.11.1940 of Comandante Superiore CC.RR. of Albania.

70) Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., page 150.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Instead at Tirana Soddu did not see the very rosy-colored perspectives.

On 15 November sent two personal letters to Col. Sorice, in which expressed "*these are an outlet for you and for you in order to guide to illuminate the Duce on the situation that daily we live in these days*"). They are letters of difficult definition, made bitter and pessimistic ⁽⁷¹⁾, in which the truth of the facts is stirred to the attempt to appear to rescue of a compromised situation; in which the judgment negative on nearly all and nearly all completely outside of his own undeniable responsibility as undersecretary to the War. and chief of the S.M.G... and first collaborator of Generals Baistrocchi and Pariani; in which it does not emerge the worst appreciation on the real possibilities of maneuver of the enemy.

The report to the S.M.R.E. were daily. The 17th, Roatta, that know instinctively the state of mind and the perturbation of the Comandante Superiore of Albania, in transmitting to Badoglio the 16th a situation reported to 7 November, wrote:

"(...) As I have communicated yesterday morning to the Duce, they are persuaded that the better judge of the situation is his Excellency Soddu, and that the faculty must be left to regulate himself as will believe more opportune.

However, if V.E. is of same the opinion, and if he approves of the understandings of his Excellency. Soddu, I think that a V.E. communication that the confirmations the aforesaid faculty and - implicitly - the advanced confidence in his decisions would be opportune".

The same Soddu day sent another private letter to Col. Sorice. The tone appears more raised, but the conclusion leaves confusion:

"(...) They are serene and trusting: they are but furious with the lightness of that they have put the army and of the honest old generals in the conditions of having to face situations of the sort ".

Then, soon after, he informed that the Greek pressure on Korça pointed out to diminish and that thought that a directly air-transported regiment therefore could "*exceed the crisis of the moment*". It is difficult at least for who is far away, to persuade himself that a crisis is serious if enough is a single regiment, hold them available immediately, in order to resolve it. But already we know as the events lead to the withdraw. The 18th the Comandante Superiore reported that "*entire the ex Army of Albania after twenty days of hunger, debilitating and continuous to attack, to resist, to counterattack has lost very many of its efficiency*"⁽⁷²⁾.

71) Appendixes 6 and 7. Col. Sorice was head of the *Cabinet* of the undersecretary for War.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

And the 19th, after the telegram of confidence sent from Badoglio⁽⁷³⁾, communicated:

"(...) From how much above it emerges clearly that in truth, to the effects of the fight here in course, the divisions *Taro*, *Pusteria*, *Trieste* and in great part the *Modena* division is up to now of the named ones to which do not correspond major unit effectively available. The same ones of my Commander tell me, that one of the 9th Army, the C.A. and the Intendancy, that they still lack means in order to work adequately.

But that that still more felt, more difficult and slow to overwhelm, is the lack almost absolute than artillery, especially for the 9th Army.

In synthesis, in order to obtain a tidy withdraw some days of resistance are still necessary at least; what I have asked the Commanders for the Army also their feeling that these days of upset resistance can perhaps coincide with the beginning of the exhaustion of enemy attack (...)⁽⁷⁴⁾.

In this exposure but it was not made note of one important decision: the approval of the predispositions assumed by generals Vercellino and Geloso and the faculty they granted to choose the moment of the regression. And doubt that practical renouncing in to one direct action of command and maneuver in a most difficult operation was convenient. The too much advanced alignment of the right wing of the 11th Army imposed that it in order first withdrew itself, protect on the flank of the 9th Army held firm. Leaving, instead, wills the two army commanders to define, to their judgment, the beginning of the withdraw, could happen that both armies withdrew at the same time or, if it had not been absurd, that it quite withdraw of the 9th before the 11th Army. And also true that Soddu had written "*is necessary maintains to constant connection between You for the mutual guidance and with me for the necessary coordination*", but to the very difficult practical action he had to be the connection when he did not exist neither in departure, and he does not see himself which coordinative action could be explained on such basis.

In Rome, in a generalized manner, he was himself tilts to hope of being able to hold the positions, but some local correction, also because consider that the Greek effort had reached the maximum limit of its possibilities.

72) DSCSFAA, f. 487/op. Segr. dated 18.11.1940.

73) DSCS, tele. 3915/op. dated 18.11.1940: "*I approve of your line of conduct totally stop holding present that withdrawn is always a delicate operation not to exhaust units on the line they puts into effect (...) with reinforces in course to trim the chosen line stop all aviation protect the operations stop deals with soon afterwards will have our argument stop well done Soddu!*".

74) DSCSFAA, f. 615/op. dated 19.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

According to the S.I.M., on the Epirus front they turned out deployed the 8th, 8th bis and 3rd Inf. Div. (in truth it was be a matter of the strong 8th Inf. Div., the 2nd and later of the 3rd); on the Pindo the 1st, the 2nd and the 22nd (in truth was the cavalry Div., the 1st Inf. Div. and the 5th Inf. Bd.); in the Korçano. the 4th, the 9th, the 10th and the 11th Inf. Div. (in effects divisions 9th, 10th, 11th, 13th, 15th and then 17th) with two divisions of infantry and one of cavalry in general reserve (in truth the 13th Inf. Div. and the 1st Cav. Div. were already on the front, moreover they were in course of preparation the 4th and 5th Inf. Div. and the 16th brigade). Being estimated improbable, because of the eventuality of the Bulgarian and German participation; that the Greek High command removed from the eastern Macedonian of the four residual divisions and of it engaged some of the general reserve, achieved some that the ten difficultly characterized divisions would have been increase. In short the number of Greek major unit available for the Albanian theater had been underrated (sketch n. 55). At Tirana, instead, the situation was considered decidedly serious, above all for the inadequacy of the rhythm of inflow of troops and means regarding the necessities of feeding the fight and for the confusion of the arrivals. In purpose, it came made to find at Rome that the wide employment of air transports and the massy arrival of unit in parts had provoked in the units one remarkable organic crisis: while they were lacking of great part of the means of transport, a mass very 14,000 draft animals, beyond to hundred of motor vehicles, were still in the Puglie waiting to embark.

In any case, on 21 November the Comando Superiore informed that the maneuver of the 11th Army was already in course of execution and that the 9th would have moved at dark. For the recorded, all the caution posted in order to realize the uncoupling of the Greek pressure was rendered in vain from bulletin 168 circulated the 22nd:

"Our troops of cover, formed by two divisions, than from the beginning of the hostilities had attested in defensive to the border Greek-Albanian of Korça, have been withdrawn, after eleven days of fight, on a line to the west of the city, that it has been evacuated (...), Are concentrated on the new line and ours reinforcements (...)",

To that Soddu could not but reply bitterly:

"Today's Bulletin n. 168 at the time to tell to the enemy how much had been attempted with every device to hide until to last moment & while the maneuver is still in course *stop* that can put in serious crisis withdraw last

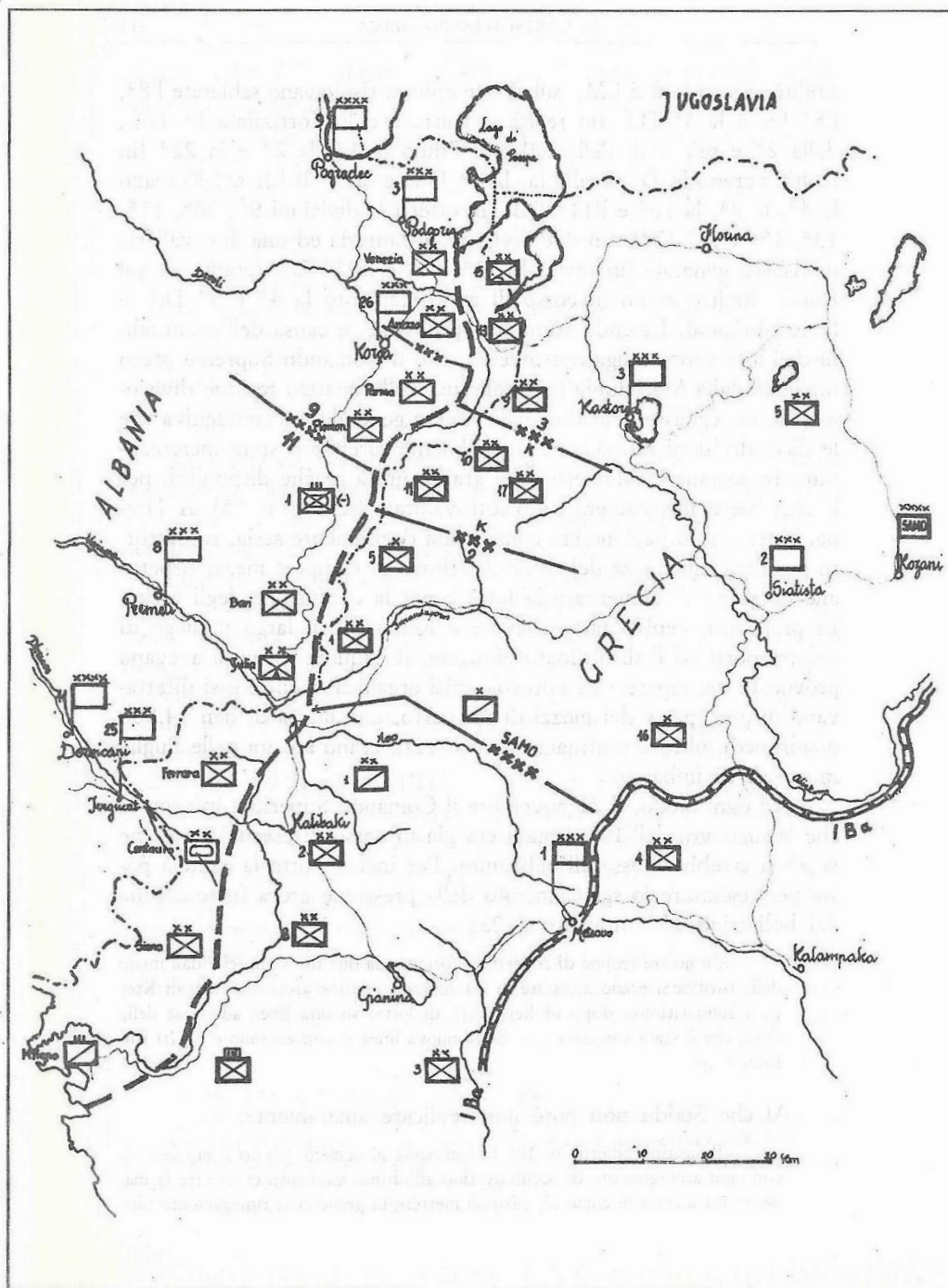
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 312

The counterpoising forces 18 November

Schizzo n. 55

LE FORZE CONTRAPPOSTE IL 18 NOVEMBRE



The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

rearguards & to induce adversary to accelerate the resumption contact with obvious damage to the operation"⁽⁷⁵⁾, but Mussolini commented: "*He must have the courage not to hide the truth from the Country*"⁽⁷⁶⁾!

It is superfluous to say that the events of Albania had created a leaden atmosphere, in which the incredulity it was stirred to the disappointment and the fear of worse. Also the Germans were worried because of the political-strategic repercussions of a Italian setback. The 15 and 16 November Badoglio had been met with Mar. Keitel at Innsbruck and naturally the Greek issue had been put on the carpet. The directives of Mussolini in merit concerned two points: to explain that the operations were in period of stasis because the political developments had not been taken place on which had been made confidence (the upraising, that is, of the Ciamuria and Bulgarian participation); not to ask any aid, but only that the Germany carried out an action in the comparisons of the Yugoslavia in order to prevent his participation. At the same time to inquire himself if he answered to truth the news that the German troops were located in Yugoslavia, and that for being able to ask the passage for our materials, especially motor vehicles⁽⁷⁷⁾.

It seems that in the course of the Badoglio conversations one has let escape, or it has made it of purpose, a sour comment that could not remain without consequences. It was then the time of Ciano to leave for the Germany: he must have an interview with Ribbentrop and with Serrano Suner and then with Hitler. From Salisburgo wrote a report to Mussolini reporting the long talk with the German Chancellor and anticipating the personal letter of these. On the diary of the Comando Supremo, in the date of 20 the November, wrote the following, *Note for the Head of S.M.G.*:

"In continuous Albania the enemy pressure that obligates us to some yielding. Telegraph to his Excellency Soddu that is well to outline with the units last arriving the chosen line for the withdraw and not to too much exhaust the troops on front line because they are in degree to carry out the difficult operation of withdraw.

On the 11th a report to the Duce reads the relationship of Ciano on the talk with Hitler. Today: continues to increase German troops in Romania in order to make sure the oil wills; the respective communicates that the intention of the Yugoslavia and Bulgaria is by now revealed to place themselves side by side to the Axis, provided that they

75) DSCSFAA, tele. 900/op. dated 22.11.1940.

76) Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., page 165.

77) D.S.C.S., dated 12 November 1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

makes sure Salonico and Dede Agac and Cavala. Hitler moreover communicates that he strives since Spain decides itself to very soon enter the war.

In a such situation one sees as - delaying our unfortunate participation in Greece - instead finding us put into effect the situation if by it more would be prepared a very promising one".

However Mussolini had keep quiet about a passage of the report of Ciano:

"(...) Mackensen had very confidentially spoken to me about the Keitel-Badoglio talk. This last one has held to make to know that he had judged the forces insufficient, that he had previewed all how much then was happened. He declined every responsibility of the success, since the decision to march had been taken against his opinion. I have not lacked to answer to Mackensen as he had and to put the points on the he (...) "⁽⁷⁸⁾.

Now, Mussolini had concurred of in spite of with the convention of Innsbruck, staying with Ciano, because he began "*to mistrust deeply*" the marshal. Indeed he had ordered "*to intensify the surveillance to the maximum for knowing what will truly be said to the Germans*" ⁽⁷⁹⁾. In the report of the three talks which do not figure expressions those that Gen. von Mackensen would have reported to our Foreign Minister. According to day, in which Badoglio was classified to speak at great length about the war with Greece, some points emerges more argumentative than true and own accusation of Mussolini. The concerning part the Albanian front therefore it is reported:

"Badoglio Marshal (...) passes to speak about Albania.

He pressed that issue to except of it [that beyond his competence must say]. The represented political situation from the Foreign Ministry to the Duce was the following: Bulgaria would have had to withhold 6 Greek divisions and in Epirus the revolution had to burst. Then the Duce that had two plans, one mine that that previewed to re-unite all the six divisions being necessary ⁽⁸⁰⁾ and to attack, the other that an attack with the few forces previewed in place, has chosen the second plan believing Bulgaria made to feel his influence and in Epirus burst the revolution. Our objective was not that the Epirus, which is the part of Greece that we expect to have for Albania.

The facts have not given reason to politics, as often happens. The Bulgarians do not have withheld the Greeks and no uprising had taken place. Then it has been stopped all and my plan is resumed to send many troops.

The previewed shipment of 12 divisions to Albania, with only two ports Durazzo and Valona,

78) G. CIANO, *L'Europa verso la catastrofe*, page. 616.

79) G. CIANO, *Diary*, page 478.

80) It is be a matter evidently of *lapsus calami*: Mar. Badoglio sure will have spoken about *twenty* divisions, like saying to Mussolini on 14 October the number of *six* divisions does not have any sense.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

it demands not less than three months, since the communications are most insufficient and in bad conditions. The situation is now stabilized on the front and continues the influx of reinforces. As soon as we will be in conditions, we will attack.

Just two objections Marshal Keitel can make: the behavior of Yugoslavia and the English participation. As far as the Yugoslavia a favorable fact to we has been taken place, in spite of the English propaganda, and just the change of the minister of war that was favorable to an participation against Italy. But then he must express an opinion formulated by the Duce, and to report to Marshal Keitel. If the Germany makes it known to Yugoslavia that if it moves it is attacked from Germany and Hungary, the Yugoslavia does not move (...).

Marshal Badoglio says that now we are firm, but that naturally the political part visa via the military part and is only taken in consideration. Summarizing therefore:

- 1) we have three months in order to move forces;
- 2) in this period the aviation will strike Greek objectives, especially the airfields;
- 3) for the Yugoslavia we have confidence in the word that the Germany will say and that it will serve to hold it firm;
- 4) once ready we will liquidate the Greek issue (...)",

It is more than reasonable that a few official phrases have been omitted in the official report⁽⁸¹⁾ and of other side it must less still admit that difficultly Ciano could have invented of healthy plants the words of Badoglio and von Mackensen. The rumor however circulated⁽⁸²⁾ and however Mussolini - than very well remembered the meeting of 10 November - believed, also because, of the support, the Popular Culture minister, Pavolini, had reported of one extremely critical confidence made to him, at his say, from Badoglio⁽⁸³⁾. And however the situation had been made indefensible.

The head of the government accused therefore the blow, especially after to have read a long personal message of Hitler, in which they did not come

81) Also in the noted manuscript of Gen. Marras, Italian military attaché in Berlin and present at the talks, do not exist trace of the recrimination of Badoglio, but, as said in the report, the omission would been widely comprehensible.

82) Gen. Puntoni (*Speaking of Vittorio Emanuele III*, page 25) write in date 25 November: "*Of other part it seems that the Marshal is not himself behaving much too loyal. While opportunely it has not made null of decisive in order preventing the war to Greece, now at the time of all in order unloading the guilt of the disaster on the shoulders of the others. It seems that in such sense he has spoken to the German General von Keitel during a talk he had with him at Monaco. Later on I have had confirmation of the complaint of Badoglio from the copy of the report sent to me by General Armellini. The Duce of has been put to the current, via Germany, and naturally he is outside of it (...)*".

83) CIANO wrote (op. cit., page 481): "*Pavolini narrates that Badoglio has made this speech it: 'Not there is doubt that Jacomoni and Visconti Prasca have the bulk of the responsibilities in the Albanian transaction. But the greater guilt must try it elsewhere, and is all in the command of the Duce. It is a commander who cannot exercise. Leave to make us, and when the things do not hits those responsible'*".

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

save strict reference to the movement flung against Greece and clearly were said that a Germanic military participation in the Balkans turned out impossible before March of the next year ⁽⁸⁴⁾.

Ciano annotated in those days:

21 November: "(...) Find the Duce serene, decided, not to disturb. With the events in Albania the grief but I do not upset. It is polemic against the soldiers, Badoglio and announces an immediate change of the guard in the military sector".

22 November: "(...) Pavolini that has right informed the Duce.

The reaction has been fulminating. Badoglio "enemy of the Regimen" the "traitor" has characterized and Epithets enough strong for just the Chief of general staff for war".

23 November: "Sebastiani confided to me today who the Duce is studying the military Yearbook the names in order to replace Badoglio and Soddu (...) "⁽⁸⁵⁾.

It is probable that the serenity of Mussolini was more appearing than real. In part the Badoglio issue, was a memorandum introduced from Roatta on the situation of the metropolitan army, in which it was made present that the moral and training conditions had gotten more and more worse; that major unit in demobilization crisis had been upset from the unexpected application of the Contingency G in its more complete version; that, finally, he was un-postponing the gradual remobilization of all the army in order to face the various requirements.

Mussolini took action all, concurring with all. It convene on the necessity of the remobilize moving gradually on the war footing 50 divisions with priority to the 30 engaged or of previewed employment in Albania and equipping to all the divisions two Battalions of fascists. He agrees with the proposals of Hitler in a short letter, but, in which, in the attempt to justify, with a series of motivations to say a little childish, that that justifiable was not and to diminish the events, used a tone sufficiency decidedly out of place:

"Sorry that my letter of 19 October cannot arrive in time for to give you way to express your opinion on the planned action in Greece, opinion that, as other times I would carefully have followed ⁽⁸⁶⁾.

The march of the Italian forces in Greece, after a promising beginning and

84) Letter dated 20.11.1940.

85) G. CIANO, op. cit., page 480-481.

86) As the letter - in which is noted, on purpose of the intention to attack Greece, Mussolini had been limited to say: "*they are decided to break off the delay very soon*" - it was sent playing on the dates, so as to put Hitler of aware the completed fact.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

fast, has been stopped allowing the Greek forces to take the initiative. That has had in particular to three causes:

- a) to the bad weather, that rage with rain violent have arrest the march of the mechanized force. One armored division, as an example, is literally sunk in the mud;
- b) to the defection nearly total of the Albanian forces that have addressed against our units. A single division of ours has, as an example, had to disarm and to send back to the rears 6,000 Albanians.
- c) to the attitude of Bulgaria that has allowed the Greeks to withdraw eight divisions that they had in Thrace and that they have come to strengthen those that already found opposite us.

All that belongs to the past and it does not have to let to formalize, although I become account that such events have been able to provoke unfavorable repercussions. Now Italy is preparing thirty divisions with which will be able to destroy Greece. Not there is reason of worry for the bombing of the southern cities, that they bring little damages.

I wish to draw your attention on two facts:

- Spain:

- Yugoslavia: this paper can today be still more important. They are ready to guarantee put into effect the frontiers and to recognize Salonicco to the Yugoslavia to the following conditions: a) that the Yugoslavia joins to the tripartite pact; b) that it demilitarizes the Adriatic; c) that the participation is realized so that the Yugoslav forces only enter lists after that Greece has received for Italian work a first blow.

I end now on these bases to how much you will want to make in order to reach such goal.

I think indispensable, in the conditions puts into effect to intensify the the collaboration between our air forces.

I have had also my black week but now worse it is passed.

The inner conditions of England, for news arrive, seem some serious effectively are by excluding the possibility of a collapse"⁽⁸⁷⁾.

In the comparisons of Badoglio, Mussolini showed indifference: nor create faith
Notes of the Chief of the S.M.G. on the diary of the Comando Supremo:

21 November: "In the late afternoon, directed to Roatta, a telegram of Soddu arrives with which he announces to have given the orders because this night the withdraw of the 9th Army has beginning in the Korçano sector. The Duce, to which the telegram has been carried from Sorice, present the Minister Ciano, telegraphs to Soddu to weigh this decision well, given the repercussion that if it will be able to have some in the political field.

Copy of the telegram is given to me at 19:30. According to my opinion, the telegram is useless because it will arrive to Soddu much too late; it can moreover be harmful if it insinuated the doubt in the mind of the Commander ".

87) Letter dated 22.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

22 November: "The report to the Duce reads the letter to me from Hitler (...). It is demonstrated happy by now decided approach of the Yugoslavia to the Axis in exchange of the promise of Salonicco (...). He then communicates to Me of being his understanding to call Pintor as the Undersecretary of War".

23 November: "No salient news. The reinforcements in Albania arrive slowly for the inadequate equipment of the disembarkation ports. It cannot with safety be asserted that we will arrive in time in order very to fortify the resistance of the chosen line.

The Duce gives news to me of two reports: of an officer of the CC.RR. and an officer of the S.M., in which he asserts that Nasci had not estimated of having himself to withdraw. According to me the withdraw has been a good measure because therefore good possibility to the defense has been given to strengthen itself.

However the stabilization of the situation in. Albania will demand, to my opinion, all December ".

But on 23 November appeared in "Il Regime Fascista" an article of Farinacci in which the author, referring to the speech turned to the Party from the same Mussolini, the 18th - *"Ourselves it is someone between you, or comrades, that it remembers the unpublished speech of pronounced at Eboli in July 1935 before the Ethiopian war? I said that we would have broken our back on the Negus. Now, with the same absolute certainty, I repeat absolute, I say you that we will break back of Greece"* - with a short phrase the Comando Supremo called in cause:

"Mussolini has proclaimed that the modern Carthage will be the defeat and that Greece will end with broken backs. We are sure that all this will be come true even if some improvidence and unreasonableness of the Commander of the General Staff General has foolishly allowed Churchill to have a diversion "⁽⁸⁸⁾.

The crisis was opened. Badoglio the afternoon of the 24th prepared for Mussolini a letter of vibrated protest complaining the fact in clear terms and, confirm that the Comando Supremo had no responsibility in those Greek events, he placed the alternative: the full retraction, completes and exhausting from part of the newspaper or his resignation from the burden of the head of the S.M.G. ⁽⁸⁹⁾. Then, the day after went to report to the Palazzo Venezia carrying with him a refutation, from it personally written, to make to publish in "Il Regime Fascista". Mussolini sent back the issue to the afternoon, and at 17:30 he received the Marshal again.

88) "After the speech of the Duce, ballast... small bourgeois" - appendix n. 8. The denomination is very strange "Comando dello Stato Maggiore Generale", a total fantasy.

89) Diary of the Comando Supremo, 24 November, Cfr. Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., page 168.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

At first he tried to belittle the importance of the indicted phrase, then attributed the initiative to Farinacci, to the end he complained that "*outside he knew and he spoke himself about the opposition made from Badoglio to the war against Greece*" (90). The papers were on the table. The following morning, 2 November, Badoglio resigned the resignation:

"Duce,
I have meditated all the night on the talk yesterday.
I omit my considerations and I limit myself to expose to the conclusions
A collaboration is profitable when there is full and mutual confidence.
Confidence of the superior, especially in the character of employed.
Confidence of the inferior, which knows that he will always be protected against
unjust attacks from the immediate participation of his superior.
Now this mutual confidence between You, Commander in Chief and I, Chief of the
General Staff, does not more exist.
Therefore they are forced to introduce my resignation from burden with Chief of
General Staff.
And since my duties by now are reduced to the compilation of the bulletin and to the
distribution of some order "*I leave the place with the conscience that my removal will not
produce some damage.*"

Badoglio ".

Therefore he wrote on the diary:

"After to have very meditated dispatch to the Duce my resignation (all. 891 ter). A report to the Duce asks 24 hours in order to make his decisions to me and I answer to him that I have null in contrary and I ask of wanting to consider my resignation as irrevocable".

The day after (27 November), a report to Palazzo Venezia:

"(...) the Duce returns on the subject of my resignation representing to me the difficulty of the substitution. I suggest to leave vacant the office, naming a deputy officer of the S.M., in place of the Gen, Soddu and I make the name of Pintor. To the goal not to create greater difficulties with expecting an immediate decision I propose to the Duce that I leave in license for seven days He waves I have the setting time with calm his decisions. The Duce arrives. I introduce moreover the convenience to name an Undersecretary of War and I make the name of the generals Guzzoni and Monti"⁽⁹¹⁾.

Frankly he leaves the proposal perplexed to leave the office vacant of the Chief of the S.M.G., was nearly useless. Perhaps he stretched not to compromise

90) Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., pag. 171. The Diary of the Comando Supremo notation in the date 25: "*In the afternoon the Duce entertains to me yesterday in the cares of my letter and he is demonstrated upset of the voices that circulate, according to which would have been rendered note my problems for the enterprise against Greece, Every decision is sent back tomorrow*".

91) DSCS, dated 27.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

a return? Before withdrawing himself for some days in Piemonte, Badoglio would have sent to the roman daily paper "La Tribuna" a letter addressed to Farinacci. That retort did not see the light, but it was known very soon in the military atmospheres because circulated clandestinely the main Commands. It was be a matter of a hard retort to the leader and of an accusation neither much too veiled to Mussolini:

"(...)Non enough, avv. Farinacci, for being a general, applying the Greek on the cap! We must make the war? enough not to call the Chief of S.M. for saying: we must make the war!

Enough in order not to make the war to then allocate the hyperbolic budgets in order administer to the S.M. with the dropper! When people have in mind to strike themselves, first of all it is necessary that the industrial equipment of the Nation endures the slow and serious suffering that transforming it into being ready to the opportune moment to produce for the war. Every effort, every will, every energy must be coordinated and be disciplined for this vital purpose, various at the necessary moment will go encounter to burning humiliation, not only from the military point of view!

A Nation that enters in war must preview in the possible limit of every the adverse fatality waves makes headway. If an allying is lawful to count also on aid of the eventual one, it is not test to trust in all on the aid this allying. That can carry to future historical consequences of immense capacity, that they will powerful weigh on the life of one Nation (...)" ⁽⁹²⁾.

An elementary sense of objectivity imposes to recognize that unfortunately all seem to have reliable in all on the aid of the ally! For a pair of days a responsible Chief lacked to the Comando Supremo. Perhaps also for this Mussolini, while he ordered Gen. Armellini to participate to the General Staff of armed force that the invasion of Corfù was considered not imminent and perhaps quite not possible and that, for against, acquired renewed importance the invasion of Preveza ⁽⁹³⁾, arranged in the meantime that Col. Sorice communicated to the S.M.R.E. to be perfect prepared for Corfù! ⁽⁹⁴⁾. The afternoon of 29 November, Gen. Guzzoni was informed by telephone that

92) Appendix n. 9. In truth, the letter then was recognized apocryphal.

93) The invasion of Preveza had been resumed in the study from the S.M.R.E., on order of Mussolini, and contemplated to the employment of the Celere C.A. (on three divisions and supplementary troops, among which were 15 battalions camicie nere) when the course of the operations had rendered it possible. The shipment to Corfù was returned from little in top: it was intention of Mussolini to carry out it after the exhaustion of the Greek counter-offensive and the consolidation of our defense; the relative plan of the S.M.R.E. previewed a C.A. on two divisions for a total of 34,000 men.

94) However on 3 December the Comando Supremo will communicated to the three General Staffs that Mussolini had decided to postpone to both the operations, reserving to himself, reschedule, to follow one or the other (that one of Preveza, on organic reduced). On ups and downs for the disembarks to it in issue cfr. Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., page 158, 175 and seg..

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

he had been name deputy of the S.M.G. and secretary of State for War. Introducing in Rome the morning of the 30th, after the audience with Mussolini he assumed both charges at once⁽⁹⁵⁾. In the same afternoon he was convened in urgency at Palazzo Venezia Gen. Cavallero. The encounter had short duration: after an exchange of views on the situation in Albania, Mussolini perceived the general who in was preached for the succession to Badoglio. The next day, resumed the talk, confirmed his the designation, reserving to himself however to emanate the decree to return Badoglio. These returned in the understanding at dawn of the 3rd, bring from the King and, sure unexpectedly, expressed the intention, or the intention availability, to withdraw the resignation the next day to the fixed audience to Palazzo Venezia⁽⁹⁶⁾ ... But on 4 December something happened that it made to slowly pass quite according to the plan also the serious emerged contrasts in those days. That day Gen. Guzzoni first brought his *Note* on the Historical diary of the Comando Supremo:

"His Excellency Soddu the morning of 4 December at 08:00 hours shows me the impossibility by telephone to continue the operations and the necessity of a diplomatic participation.

The examination of the situation gives reason for me to think that the crisis can be exceeded and that it is not in no acceptable way the point of view of his Excellency Soddu. The Duce, to which I report the words of His Excellency Soddu, agrees and he orders him of contend the land to the enemy until to the end. It orders to His Excellency Cavallero to leave at once for Albania for the examination in situated of the situation".

He was arriving as? The problems that harassed the Comandante Superiore of Albania were many and ponderous and for sure balance was necessary a mind truly in order to face them. With the situation of the 29th gave to news of the loss of Bregu Bari Kuqit and of the fight for Pogradec from part of the 9th Army, and the decided purpose of Geloso to withdraw the 11th Army, also to cost to lose Santi Quaranta, Delvino and Argirocastro, in order not to reach already to a dangerous exhaustion of the reliable units that "*could have had not expectable consequences*". It moreover specified to have left it free to decide visa vie the planned maneuver, in how much agreed substantially

95) The morning the Council of Ministers had gathered, in the course about which Mussolini had spoken to along about the meeting of 15 October. After to have recognized his own responsibility of the political decision, Badoglio attacked: "*the thesis of the Duce is this: not only Badoglio was of agreement, but it was also manifested the extremely political side of the issue has been perfect: it is lacked in full burden the military action*" (G. CIANO, op. cit., page 483). Naturally, categorical affirmations therefore render any comment superfluous.

96) Cfr. A. PUNTONI, op. cit., page 29, and Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., page 184.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

on the operating appreciations formulated by the commander of the 11th Army and he thought not to be able to make to prevail the political opposition and moral to conserve any inhabited centers "*on the necessity to absolutely avoid a serious yielding of the whole army*". The aspects closely operated were not the single ones to give restlessness reason. In the sector of the 9th Army, in special way, had been revealed sure sourness in the relationships with the Albanians, because of the unfortunate performances of some of their units and the desertion of others. And also the impoverishment of the units was from resolving on a more organic base, predisposing both the shipment of the complements for the exhausted divisions, and the reinstate of the arms and the materials lacking to urgent extraordinary means of supply. Therefore the preparation in native land was asked for numerous units complements, to send via airplane in order not to interfere on the program of the transports via sea of the organic divisions, whose rhythm, did not have to endure a deceleration.

But the perhaps heavier argument was than other nature and concerned the action of command carried out to the various levels. It was passed a month from the beginning of the campaign and by now existed elements very defined in order to pull the first sums and to put in prominence the errors committed. Having nothing to do with the unjustified optimism the wide begins diffused them in the divisions - of which, evidently, they did not have some guilt, the responsibility going back to who had provoked to such euphoric conviction -, after the loss deriving from the ascertainment that the enemy struck itself well was replaced in order nearly automatic contrast the opposite error: from the excessive undervaluation of the Greek army had been fallen in its over appreciation. This psychological phenomenon negative, much naturally, had engendered a timidity of behavior and a psychosis of the encirclement. In the forefront to such state of things and some serious episodes of unjustified abandonment of positions, the action of command was appeared, on the whole, not adapted to the moment. Soddu, addressing all the commanders of the Army and Army Corps admonished:

"(...) Above all to hold account that the soldier always get taken care of. I have noticed instead that the soldiers were often felt in the most complete abandonment. There were battalions who had not ever seen their major general. Too much it is misused and it is misused dry provisions. The Commanders delay in asking to the Intendancy what is needed by the units. It must react against bad conduct that goes diffusing to resolve all the practical ones, also the more urgent and supporters with the needs of the troops, with the shipping and the number of protocol.

In a moment as it puts into effect it them all the hierarchy must exit outside the office and cast towards the soldier in order to state of the real needs, and to supply

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

to satisfy them in the more complete way. Enough not to give orders: it must control of personally the execution. It is a common place, but that unfortunately in the practical one never consideration is not held as due (...) "⁽⁹⁷⁾.

and recalled the great, eternal truth who "*the soldier does not hold when inadequate has been the moral and material preparation, when the officials do not know to led*".

The development of the combats of first of December was not, as known, comforting: Lost Pogradec; the joint between the armies on the verge of collapse; the uninterrupted enemy pressure on the high valleys of the Skumbi and the Devoli, in the area of the Osum, to Premeti, on the Bureto; the yielding on the single features of the front with difficulty plugged; the by now winter climate; all it contributed to fear dark perspectives. After a carried out an inspection tour on 3 December, Soddu sent to Rome a discouraged panorama:

"I have visited the troops yesterday (...).

B) STATE OF THE COMMANDS

While the General Staffs have gradually been completed, remains the serious crisis of the action of command, because of the insufficiency of the connections and the absolute lack of reserves. This same Command does not have, to as of today, a single telephone operator of its own. No Commander of army has received, until today, the engineer units assigned.

The action of command is reduced therefore to giving councils that very little resolve, to organize, to strengthen; but or little null it can be completed in order to graduate the effort of resistance in connection with the opposing effort; in as much as the enemy disgusts under with solid battalions and not with of the sterile words.

In the Commanders, after many days of attended of the possibility of being able to work, it is today a marked sense of distrust.

C) STATE OF THE UNITS.

While whichever staggering in depth lacks, the troops online are most tired: for a good half worn out, it does not give any confidence of being able to hold the last positions. It is dealt in fact, or of troops that uninterruptedly fight of nearly 40 days without hope of substitution, or unit thrown in the battle hardly arriving at the ports or the airports without the time to catch their breath, sometimes as soon as mobilized, incomplete of means and organs remained behind, and whose rendering is therefore very much inferior to that normal. Such troops mostly lacking of blankets, of stretch sometimes and also of food.

Resist with their teeth; but of forefront to the great strength of the enemy numbers, of arms and more coolness, by now is forced to yield the land meter by meter; the distrust is diffused; the episodes do not lack ill-fated heroic value, but unfortunately I must also complain episodes of units that have been smashed in unexpected way (es. 207th infantry *Taro*).

97) DSCSFAA, f. 1155/op. dated 27.11.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The temperature has become stiff. In mountain abundant snow has fallen.

Winter garments few, always insufficient, do not succeed to reach the line.

Already many are had freezing. I cite the episode of a detachment of the *Piemonte* division, in great part Sicilian, garrison of the position of Qafa Martes that, taken from strong torments, has endured such human wear and tear to lose every efficiency. Many men did not have more the force than to draw themselves from the snow to ignite some a little fire; it has been necessary to help trying them to withdraw from the valleys also the cost to leave the position momentarily defenseless on which of other part they did not give some guarantee.

The inferior pictures have endured strong losses. The organization, already deficit, has become for some units totally insufficient.

The losses of arms and material (of which I still do not succeed to know precise elements) are important; they are due in great part to the fact that many baggage trains still have not reached the units.

On the whole the units have a much reduced consistency: the battalions, in kind, conserve the efficiency of a company, efficiency that goes of day in day diminishing, while from yesterday the Greeks they deliver a new offensive with new and fresh troops.

D) STATE OF THE SERVICES.

For how much it has been made and make yourself, the logistic organization is still very weak to correspond to the requirements, and that for the lack still in action both of organs and that of means.

The irrational cargos continue on the steamboats: draft animals parted from the harnesses and leading; services broken up; ships loaded without any regard to organic ties; and so the units arrive in fragment and the resetting is long and difficult.

At Bari it is continued in full rhythm of peace: cargo operation to timetable, festive rest, lessened suspension I point out of rain or aerial alarm. At Valona and at Durazzo is laboriously putting a little order and organization. But the equipments of the ports, with the state of fact, do not allow an adequate rendering. Adding to that the length of the communications and the state of the roads only slowly allow the inflow of the forces and means from the ports to the lines ⁽⁹⁸⁾.

CONCLUSION.

The procedure of the sea, the ports and the roads does not allow the arrival on the line more than a pair of battalions to the day and also these without all their means.

Therefore the employment to little by little continues, in order makes plugs, so that the day is concluded constantly in passive; the liabilities therefore increase of day by day affecting the consistency of the units fatally. We are constantly in delay regarding the rhythm of the battle.

Further retreat on the more rear lines with the units already engage are from excluding themselves in the more absolute way. The situation is therefore delicate and can end up from a moment to the other in a total yielding of the front

98) Gen. Roatta, in reserving himself a careful control on the issue of cargos, pointed out that the cargo possibilities of the Bari port were remarkably advanced to those of drainage of the Albanian ports, and therefore the complaint - psychological aspect to part - it would have been appropriated in the inverse case.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

with very serious consequences. Such moment can be taken place also in these days.

Since it is me that must preview every eventuality, while I have ordered the resistance to the bitter end in place, I will establish that the Commanders of army, with the last battalions in arrival, predispose obstructions to defense of the communications more important in order to create possibility to collect what will be possible to withdraw in case the disgraceful yielding happens.

These define obstructions at about the line: Librazhd – Drize - Mt. Tomori – Klisura – Tepeleni - Port Palermo.

To the state of fact I must hold to conclude that with the situation created now, the rhythm of the inflow of reinforces practically experimented does not leave to preview the possibility, let alone of a resumption, nor of an equilibrium.

To this conclusion they are reached yesterday evening after to have stated the state of fatigue and distrust of the units and the Commanders who see every day more to increase the disproportion of forces ⁽⁹⁹⁾.

In this atmosphere, Soddu telephoned to Guzzoni representing the necessity of a "diplomatic participation" in order to resolve the Greek transaction. It is difficult to give a precise idea of what the telephone call provoked in Rome, much more of the letter, even if encircled from all the possible secrecy. Between first that they came to acquaintance of the thing, the coldest one it was probably Guzzoni that, caused Mussolini, declared without ambiguity that the military crisis, being long without hope, could be exceeded. It seems lawful to think that Soddu has meant to refer to the German or Bulgarian armed participation or Yugoslavia in any form, to ask with urgency, however the expression from he used, sure unfortunate, was translate in Rome as necessity to demanded a armistice:

"(...) Mussolini calls to me - Ciano writes - to Palazzo Venezia. I find him disheartened. He says Here "not is more nothing to make. It is absurd and grotesque, but it is therefore. It must ask the truce through Hitler (...) ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾".

While he had made to come also Gen. Cavallero, which he listened without to show perturbation, shared the opinion of Guzzoni and concurred to leave immediately for Tirana. In this emergency,

99) DSCSFAA, f. 1648/op. dated 4.12.1940.

100) G. CIANO, op. cit., page. 484. Other confirmations of the state of depression of Mussolini are supplied from Pricolo (op. cit.) and from Ambassador Alfieri, then in Rome in convalescence and called to the Palazzo Venezia in order return at once to Berlin. (*Due dittatori di fronte*, page 104): "I found the Duce extremely upset - says Alfieri -- as I had never seen him (...) spoke about Soddu's telegram trying to find the reasons that they could have induced him to exaggerate the gravity of the situation (...)".

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Badoglio was introduced to Mussolini. The talk was undoubtedly painful. According to the version of Gen. Armellini, that at 13:45 went to the house of Badoglio and from him received familiarity and warmth, concluded therefore:

"- Since I'm a soldier, if you believe it, remain to my place - Badoglio said - in order to avoid a crisis that beyond in the inside would have repercussions also to the foreign country. It would be but necessary that I be from You guaranteed not more to be attacked from the press in order to avoid that between some day lathes to the same point. If you will have little to say to you must only say it to me. I pray to you therefore to decide.

- You see, in order to decide, I would still need having a time of 24, 36 or even also 48 hours.

- You forget that I am a man of meat and bones and with a spirit, that I have a name that is conquered to the service of the country.

I cannot still attend. - Stamane has sent Cavallero to Albania in order to see if Soddu still has his nerves in place. If Soddu cannot resist the command, Cavallero will take his place. If they can resist, Cavallero returns to take you.

- Duce, this reasoning is not logical, I cannot wait for the decisions of Mr. Cavallero.

-It is, just my reasoning in truth is not logical.

- Then I ask you to decide seated being and to leave me free.

- You see, I must frankly say that they are introduced to me of the difficulties for giving to the country the news of your substitution.

- If it is therefore you put to me endured in freedom, but announcing to the country my substitution when you believe better.

- It goes well, from this moment you are free"⁽¹⁰¹⁾

Formulae judgments on the dismissal of Badoglio is issue that beyond the scopes of the present volume and, on the other hand, would have to embrace very immense panorama. Consider, however, profitable, to paint the effects provoked from the gesture, to cite the declaration of Gen. Pricolo, not favorable to the marshal, and the interpretations supplied from the main foreign sources. The former wrote:

"(...) it is sure that the removal of Marshal Badoglio, in that particular period, was a most serious damage for the nation and especially for the army, that, reason or to twisted, revere in the good old Italian marshal the military glories, and he did not understand in order which reason came discharged just in the moment in which the greatest crisis he was dismissed by our army.

101) Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., pag. 188-190.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

As I could later on state personally, the moral of the troops and the pictures had an sensitive financial ruin, rendered still more serious, and, said nearly dangerous, for the endured feeling diffused that something of irreparable had happened between the Army and the Party and the Army and the Military service (...)"⁽¹⁰²⁾,

Radio London and Radio Ankara dwelt on hypothesis and appraisals, but in short the comments were much near that brought back above.

(102) F. PRICOLO, op. cit., pag. 70.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 328
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The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Chapter VIII

THE BATTLE OF ARREST
(4 - 31 December 1940)⁽¹⁾

1. THE EVENTS FROM 4 TO 8 DECEMBER.

Towards 13:00 of 4 December Gen. Cavallero arrived at Tirana and conferred at once with Gen. Soddu, at Comando Superiore. The situation was illustrated to him from Lt. Col. Fornara, head of the operations section, without half terms:

"I) The campaign against Greece were set up on the presupposing that Greece would abandoned the arms and that our action could be reduced to a logistic movement.

Therefore:

- forces were totally insufficient;
- linear alignment and fronts large;
- Commands deprived of staff and means;
- rudimentary logistic organization regarding the ports, the roads, the motor vehicles, the connections, the supplies, and most of all the conviction of having to face a military march rather than a battle.

II) The offensive beginning in Epirus can therefore define as a action conceived with strategic features and insufficient conduct with forces and means, also for a tactical action of modest scope. Such operation, carried out in prohibitive meteorological conditions, quickly carried to the exhaustion of the offensive ability to the units and to one deep disappointment of the Commanders and the troops.

In initial situation the Greek counter-offensive had good game (...).

1) The indication of the date of 31 December is in truth tied to the change of the Comandante Superiore. The Greek offensive of year-end lasted until to 3 January 1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

The issue of the losses was somewhat complex for the little reliability of the data. On 4 December, on the basis of the *nominative* signaling, had the following picture:

	died	wounded	missing	total
officers	53	99	32	184
NCOs and troops	622	1,464	704	2,790
officers M.V.S.N.	-	-	-	-
camicie nere	21	55	4	80
Albanians	2	6	-	8
totals	698	1,624	740	3,062

To reason, but of the incomplete anchor organization of the Commands and the difficulties of the communications, the signaling reached also with more than a month of delay. Consequently, he could himself reasonably be tripled the nominative data reached. To find, moreover, that the figures in issue were not comprehensive of the ill and of the Albanian deserters.

General Cavallero listened, agreed, then with the Comandante Superiore went to Elbasan, center of the Command of the 9th Army, whose situation appeared most precarious, for an interview with Gen. Vercellino, to which he placed three specific interrogated: possibility of holding, hypothesis of an ulterior regression behind the line of the Skumbini river, time presumably at disposition in order to realize this hypothesis.

Returning towards 19:00 to Tirana, Gen. Cavallero hurried to telephone Mussolini for brief him on the state of fact:

"Cavallero: Return in an hour from Elbasan. The people are nervous to the place. Situation: I refer especially to the 9th Army, than in this moment is the more important. Today the situation is a little improved. If the Greeks continue the pressure who have exercised in last the three days the Army is forced to withdraw. If there is distension - it must consider that the Greeks have employed all the units that were retired, and that is from two to three divisions - the withdraw can be avoided, otherwise imposed. (...).

It is indispensable to occupy with elements the cut back of Tirana. For this occupation two divisions are necessary. Time available, in hypothesis worse 8-10 days. Enough that the men with the arms, guns and ammunitions of two divisions arriving at Durazzo, of which one alpine and of truly and completely ready infantry, because the shipment of patch work units is more harmful than useful.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

I repeat, for the 14th or 15th, better for the 12th, in Tirana are necessary men, arms, guns and ammunitions in order to create a support to the rear, that it can improve the ability of the troops to resistance in place. Mules, in according to time: we can supply with those units that withdraw. 8-10 days are too few, but I think that this effort is necessary.

I have not seen Geloso. The 11th army is better. Soddu has seen it yesterday, has reported the situation to me and I think both in degree and to make cover to Klisura, and to occupy the cut back of mount Valona, that he must also be considered in the picture (...).

M.:

C.: Soddu is present here.

M.:

Soddu: They are very happy with Cavallero, Duce. I have seen the CLII Bn. camicie nere; it has made ovation in your name. They are a good unit⁽²⁾. Only an unit of *Forlì*⁽³⁾ does not have an adequate commander.

M.:

S.: Not doubted... The losses of officials are many forts. *Taro* has strong deficiency of officials. Too many companies are commanded from a single second lieutenant of complement. They on with one will be able itself to be put some thirty of permanent officials or complement, old squadristi or Spanish legionari. Two or three that I have made to come make prodigy. Therefore nothing bureaucracy and to accept questions. They are harder in expecting. I have submitted to the Court the commander of the 41st for place abandonment. I have removed the commander of division to Z. [Zaccone] and is in course the inquiry. The *Modena* goes well" ⁽⁴⁾,

The telephone conversation could not, evidently, tranquilize Mussolini. Ambassador Alfieri, introduced to his presence soon after, is the much eloquent in painting atmosphere of loss and depression that fluttered to Palazzo Venezia and, above all, in showing the superficiality - and the lack of an elementary sense of coldness in estimating national events of interest - with which came sent urgently to Berlin: "*Any aid, that is provided immediately - Ciano said - and useless to specify or to express of the preferences through the military attaché, General Marras. You must obtain the favorable decision in political center personally*

2) Deriving a very debatable judgment. The same day of 4 Decembers Gen. Geloso sent to Gen. Soddu the following telegram: "027261 *It had been joyously announcement arrival of CC.NN. battalions stop I have had true disillusion stop drafted groups of men collected hastily incompletely little armed semi stop no training always badly commanded stop example 155th Bn, lacks 18 guns medium machine guns & nearly lacks radios stop majority men have military instruction stop run risk of serious consequences estimating combatant at forces number men & effective relation military ability impulse & maneuver stop are not necessary in order to resist & to gain organic units well framed & to train stop*".

3) The reference is not clear the *Forlì* was still - in Italy.

4) Diary Cavallero, dated 4.12.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

from Hitler. The situation is such for which the shipment of some airplanes and guns, to reinforce some units of troop can be to us of great aid. Trading to earn himself of the days, perhaps also of hours..."⁽⁵⁾. But Mussolini had picked out also to the possibility of a breach of the front and, sure a few serenely points, decided to make to send from Col. Sorice - they do not give the Comando Supremo - the following telegram to the person of the Gen. Soddu:

"You must contend the land to the enemy until the possible end *stop* It is my conviction that the enemy played all his cards since not backed by own war industry and can only count on the refueling of the G.B. *stop* Must however not escape again showing itself worse of the hypotheses and that is the defense of northern Albania and that one - of reduced of Valona *stop* (...).

Is necessary therefore that units working engineers & already to your disposition & units that flow & units in second formation begin at once work of material defensives & occupation of said fronts *stop* In the shipment troops will come given the succession that you will demand to such scope *stop* you have put to your disposition also the *Cuneense* division *stop* Assured"⁽⁶⁾.

Soddu, for his part, had circulated directives n. 5⁽⁷⁾ with which he imposed the resistance to the end on the alignment from Mt. Kalaze (northwest of Pogradec) to Port Palermo, but ordered the preparation of obstructions to work of unit of Guard to the frontier to Librazhd and Gramshi for the 9th Army, and Q. Dardhe, Cerevode, Klisura, Tepeleni and Porto Palermo for the 11th army, to less close to the rear more or of the defensive position. Moreover he was taken care to speed up the completion of the maneuver of 11th Army and to determine the good line of contact between the two Armies. That fact, answered to Mussolini:

"I assure that orders from me & circulate to you of which will be cured at all costs the performance in relation to the events correspond to the directives that You give to me."⁽⁸⁾

5) D. ALFIERI, op. cit., page. 106 and seg. The audience with Hitler (6 December) was rather painful, not withholding from the criticizing sourly Italian Commanders and troops; however, after to have express the opinion that was not possible to create diversion effective in Bulgaria, he promised the shipment of cargo planes, and then he added: "*Task to the concrete possibility to make a strong counterattack with two armored divisions and the aid of stukas in order going around the Greek army. About that I want to speak to the Duce. It is urgent (...)*". Alfieri immediately telegraphed the report of the talk to Rome, but after two days he was called by Ciano, which, without embarrassment shadow, he communicated to it: "*It remains meant that you do not have to ask any aid, null, absolutely null. However the news is better and the critical phase can by now be exceeded easy*". Subsequently the introduced official demand from Gen. Favagrossa, undersecretary to the Fabrications of war, regarded only the raw materials.

6) DSCSFAA, tele. 160051 Cabinet dated 4.12.1940.

7) DSCSFAA, f. 1772/op. dated 4.12.1940..

8) DSCSFAA, tele 1776/op. dated 5.12.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

In the meantime, Cavallero had telephoned to Ciano, passing on much said to Mussolini the information of the previous day and coming in his turn on the fact that *"Alfieri already has left in flight for Berlin with precise instructions"*. Therefore he had gone to Durazzo in order to become personally acquainted with the entity of the throttling in the channel of the supply and decided to resolve in any case what it appeared like the heavier tie. The visit to the port and the harbor systems was taken care of and analytics: Adm. Sportiello, who accompanied Cavallero, exposed how much was being made and how much was in program, what already it had been demanded (among other things, a bridge-building battalion for Valona) and that one was still necessary to ask. After all, everything considered it was thought possible to disembark to the end of the month the following daily tonnages: 800 t. at San Giovanni di Medua, 4,000 t. at Durazzo (instead of the 2,500 currently) and 1,200 t. to Valona, for total 6,000 t. approximately. In according to weather it had to be increased the potentiality of the three bases of 20% carrying but Valona to 2,500 t., so as to arrive to the 10,000 t. every day considered necessary⁽⁹⁾. Returning to Tirana, Gen. Cavallero reported to Mussolini at great length, to which he addressed then a reassuring message.

In the late afternoon it was the time of the new Quartermaster, Gen. Scuero, that much serious truth without a veil revealed: absolute deficiency of provisions of reserve, ammunitions, material of the radios, motor vehicles, material from construction and organization of the lines of stage still to the embryonic stage. Unfortunately any urgent provision could not that represent a drop of ahead to the material river that would have been necessary. But a logistic apparatus cannot be improvised, and the time that to it has not been dedicated in organizational center spends lately doubled and in the course of the strategic battle (sketch n. 56).

On 6 December, Cavallero went in the sector of the 11th Army, at Tepeleni, to confer with Gen. Geloso and C. Rossi. All adding, the obtained impression from the visit and the taken contacts was positive.

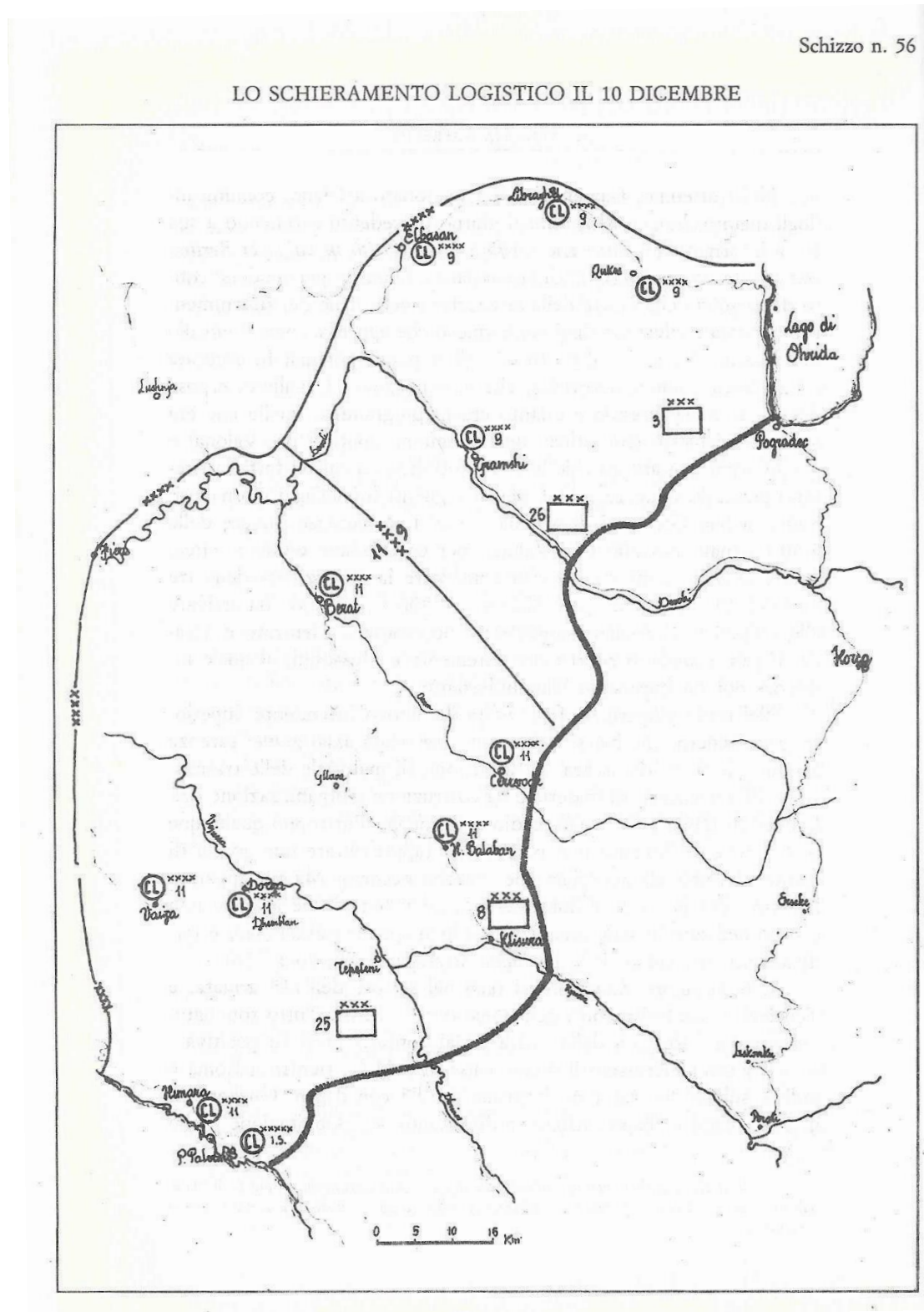
The next day at 09:00 the new head of S.M.G returned to Rome and called at once two meetings: the first for the 8th with Gen. Guzzoni and Gen. Cappa, chief of the office for ordering and mobilization of the

9) The daily arrivals had been calculated in 2 kg. of food/man, 1,000 t. of aeronautical material, 1.000 t. of automotive material, forages, ammunitions, more 300 t. for the population.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 334

The logistic alignment on 10 December



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

S.M.R.E.; the second one for 9th with the undersecretaries of State for the three Armed Forces, Gen. Negro head of the Unit of the S.M.R.E., Gen. Cappa and Starace, chief of general staff of the M.V.S.N. the first conference regarded the possibilities of immediate aid in the logistic field. Premised that it was necessary to forward it from part of the Comando Superiore Albania of an organic program of demands founded on the ability for drainage of the receiving ports, Guzzoni specified to be in departure a complete truck regiment (1,250 motor vehicles), while the Germany had to start a first group of 800 trucks, of the 3,000 promises on loan, through Yugoslavia - which but opposed difficulty -, and to find in state of preparation four divisions: the *Acqui*, the *Cuneo* and the *Brennero*, of infantry, and the *Cuneense*, alpine. The meeting of the 9th continued the study of provisions to put into effect quickly in order to face the Albanian crisis. Gen. Guzzoni fixed the general criterion to follow for, the transports: all the units would have been transported via sea; complements and supplying in quantitative small for via airplane (the Junker just arrived from Germany were ready to begin their service). It came then agreed that the *Acqui* and the *Cuneense* had at the same time to disembark at Valona and at Durazzo, beginning the movements the 10th and completing them for 28 December. The problem was always that one of the drainage: the point key of the logistic solution. Cavallero insists for the increment of the potentiality of the three Albanian ports and asked the impossible in order to obtain the two thirds party of the two divisions foretold within eight days. The examined issues were several: the shipment of other divisions, mountain battalions, battalions complements, legions of the military service, ammunitions, the motor vehicles and one or two Commands of army corps (the IV and VI). The report of the meeting is to short demonstration - where it was still need - than the Greek enterprise had just not been thought war problem (that naturally it transformed ipso facto the enterprise in adventure) and provokes the painful sorrow that much fervor was not emerged a month at least before, not as soon as comprised the completed error⁽¹⁰⁾.

While at Rome was reached the situation the 07:00 hours of 8 Decembers: the 9th Army had completed an ulterior regression regarding the positions occupied the 4th and such withdraw, in part imposed from the vicissitudes of the combat in the field of the III

10) Diary Cavallero, date 8.12.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Corps, had been *"unpleasant in particular for the XXVI C.A., in how much of it had considerably lengthened the front and it has forced it to abandon harsh mountain positions that will be hard to retake"*. For a pair of days the bad climatic conditions had sharpened the uneasiness of the troops and rendered the supplying still more difficult. And also true that also they had provoked a slowing down of the Greek attacks, but already new concentrations of troops were outlined, especially at the joint of the two army corps. In the field of the 11th armed the enemy had been contained in the Osum valley, although his violent efforts. Concluding, Gen. Soddu communicated to have confirm the order to maintain at all costs the positions puts into effect but *"I cannot still absolutely think that the situation has reached an equilibrium"*. To his warning only inflow of the new divisions and withdrawal from the line of that more tried could concur the control of the events and *"without to enter in the merit of relative hypotheses to new events of political character and considering only the military aspect of the situation"*⁽¹¹⁾.

From Greek part there was euphoria, but soothed. On 22 November Metaxas had spoken by radio emphasizing, just, the successes of the Greek arms, but not hiding that the fight would have been long and hard. Now the Greek troops were quite beyond the border Albanian. But was ignored the command crisis who disturbed the conduct of the Italian operations and was not estimated adequately the state of exhaustion of our troops. The first of December Gen. Papagos, accompanied from the hereditary Prince and the head operations section of the Comando Supremo, made a visit the main Commanders in order to form a personal idea on the events and the state of the things. A particular reason induced it to withhold himself at Zitsa, to the I Corps, more than elsewhere: it was not satisfied of the slowness with which the army corps moved, in spite of the repeated solicitations. The disadvantage was attributed to the physical exhaustion and psychical of the 8th Inf. Div. and, consequently, the issue of the substitution of the unit was placed. On the Italians the information supplied from aviation were not shown much precise, however Papagos had been convinced that they would have opposite a tenacious resistance in order to conserve Argirocastro and Santi Quaranta. Now, of the three initially objects fixed - the basin of Korça, the roadway Perati-Korça and the artery S. Quaranta – Delvino - Kakavia - the first two had been is achieved integrally, the third appeared clearly attainable with an further effort. Decided to conserve the initiative as long as possible and not to grant

11) DSCSFAA, f. 2000/op. dated 8.12.1940

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

pauses, Papagos determined the new objectives that, in correspondence of the director Gianina- Valona, they had to consolidate the possession of the road junction Tepeleni - Klisura: Mt. Skivovik (on the Kurvelesh) - Mt. Desnica (to the west of Tepeleni) - Q. Gllaves and Dobrusha (positions to sides of the Osum, controlling the outlets from north on Klisura). The maneuver was still based on anchoring the entire device towards the north, with hinge of the right wing. The operating design came realizing itself after the visit to the front and acquired shape in the "Instructions" circulated soon after from the Supreme Command. The Section of Armed of Western Macedonian (III body and K group, with four divisions altogether: 9th, 10th, 13th and 17th Inf. Div.) it guaranteed the possession of the plateau of Korça and assured the connection with the II Corps facilitating some the operations. To the center, the II army corps (1st, 11th and 15th Inf. Div.) it had the task to attack along the Frasheri - Qarishta and Fratarit director with the task to conquer with a encircling from the northeast the positions to north of the furrow Klisura- Telepeni. At the same time it had to be covered from eventual counterattacks coming from Berat. On the left, the I Corps (2nd, 3rd and 4th Ind. Div.) the road junction of Tepeleni had to occupy securely the dominant positions and to possibly come down in Sushica valley beyond the Kurvelesh.

In general reserve, three good divisions (the 8th Inf. Div. in the zone of Kakavia; the cavalry division in the zone of Konitsa; the 5th Inf. Div. at Q. Qarrit) and four brigades (the 5th Inf. Bd. on the Radomit; the 16th Inf. Bd. to east south of Florina; the Cav. Bd. to northwest of Konitsa; the Liuba detachment in the zone of Delvino). Such G.U., in effects, were sector reserves with employment tie, in the eventuality of the resource to they from part of the Supreme Command.

Of the criteria to follow for the executive modalities, two deserve reference. "*For no reason must the G. U. neglect any occasion of exploit in depth their eventual successes*" arranged Papagos, and if the concept were never developed in the strategic field undeniably it was on the tactical plan, even if to rather shortened. The second heavy issue also for us concerned the one: the army corps had to employ the divisions "*with all their organic means (...) avoiding breaking them up and of placing for shares to the orders of other G. U.. This last case it can be admitted a single exceptional circumstances, not being justified habitually if not in the combats of which the enemy it has assumed initiative*".⁽¹²⁾

12) F. A.P. 13948 dated 12.12.1940 - Greek Cfr. S.M;E., op. cit., vol. III., appendix 14.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

2. THE OPERATIONS IN THE SECTOR OF THE 9th ARMY.

The fall of Mt. Sareces, happened on 3 December the crowning of the Greek efforts in the sector of Pogradec, seemed to impose a alteration to the defensive line. Persuaded that of, the commander of the III Corps had endured tried and characterized to back the positions on which to implant the new position of resistance, such that Vercellino, sharing such opinion, decided to carry the defense to north of the confluence of the two Skumbini, Llenge and Dunica, is worth to say where the valley of the Skumbi shrinking itself concurred more better to make a front the numerical superiority of the adversary. On this alignment, more rear by a dozen of kilometers online by air: Lem Giaferit - Tè Puzi - Bregu Macullit - Bregu Kullolit - Bregu Kersakut (sketch n. 57), it thought to line up all the units that could still flow to the III Corps, while the *Arezzo* and *Venezia* had the task to contrast the land step to step.

The provision appeared the only alternative to the problematic defense in place, but it resolved little: the *Tridentina*, in fact, because of the threat that was incumbent from the direction of the Devoli, was not in a position to counter maneuver on the flank of the Greek troops that were about to come down the Skumbini; in order to avoid therefore that the left wing of the *Tridentina* remained uncovered, it was necessary that the division in its turn modified the alignment. But, at the same time, directive n. 5 had arrived of the C.S.F.A.A., with which Gen Soddu imposed, without alternative possibility, to harden the resistance on the alignment Mt. Kalaze – Kamia - Mt. Lenijes - Çuka and Bofnjes - Mt. Velushes, feeding to the defense with how much was possible to draw from the rears. It derived some that Vercellino had given the correct order and to attribute precautionary character and *of study* to indicated different.

On the front of the army everywhere were recorded sector efforts.

To east of the III Corps lost Mt. Macikak; other successive inflections were restored from decided counterattack, but the deficiencies in the operation of the Commands and the transmissions were made to feel still more painfully.

In logistic field a most serious disadvantage, aggravated always more for the disorder and the precariousness of the ordinary supplying existed then: the alarming deficiency of ammunitions, reached the point to by signal the unavailability of rounds for the machine-gun and hand grenades

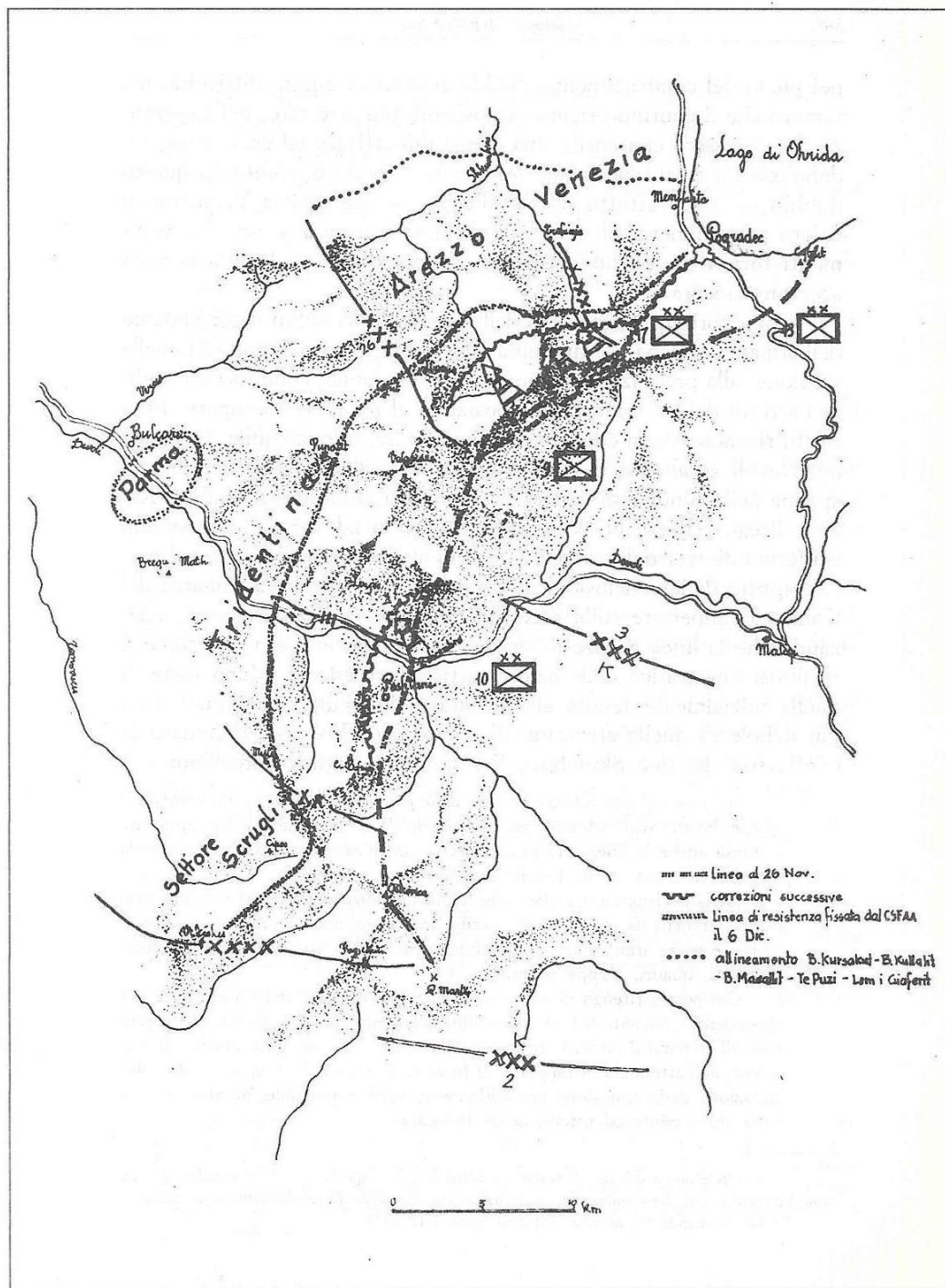
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 339

The operations on the front of the 9th Army from the 1 to 4 December

SCHEZZO II. 21

LE OPERAZIONI SUL FRONTE DELLA 9^a ARMATA DAL 1° AL 4 DICEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

in the full load of the combat. Soddu knew these difficulties, but he feared that the continuous resource to more rear positions, in the hope that could concur a more effective and economic defense, weakened the stubbornness of a resistance in depth and, pushed from this doubt - and above all from Cavallero⁽¹³⁾ -, expressed to Vercellino the clear resolution to refuse further withdraw less than forerunner to events than extreme solutions, to place to *the study* but they do not give to still accept.

Then he authorized the evacuation of the Ostravice and met the commander of the army to Tirana. An examination was made of the operating possibilities in the meeting, in the presence of the General head of the S.M., lead to establish the arrest of the 9th Army on the positions occupied at the moment. Moreover it was recognized the convenience to block, where possible, the narrows of the Devoli to the height of Mali Sogor and to the get one's bearings to retake, hardly in the conditions for making it, the lost positions: Macikak, the Kamia, Bregu the Brezavet, Valamare. Re-entered to Elbasan, Vercellino confirmed to have given categorical orders to the two army corps in the precise spirit with the conclusions in argument, but he replied to the observations of the Comando Superiore on the excessive tendency to withdraw, emphasizing that the Kalaze – Kosica - Gur line the Llenges was simply the topographical result of previous the tactical actions. Weak that than initially held to the head of the Skumbi, was also much more weak than that rear one, of *definitive arrest*, that it dominated the confluence of the two Skumbini. For this, Vercellino asserted:

"(...) while I do not mean to recede from the positions currently occupied from the troops, however I have ordered, for a criterion of obvious precaution, to prepare to defense also definitive the rear line in relation to how much deciding from that Command to the n. 1 of directives n. 5.

In the decision also I have considered the contribution of reinforcements received: cc.nn. Bn., animated with a alive spirit, but, like noted, with insufficient training and without arrival let alone infantry-support weapons, lacked the complements, table, troop and arms (...).

That place, I think of being able to assert that in the Commander of the army and the dependent C. A. Commands the single criterion exists clear and precise to wear away until the end the enemy, harmonizing scope and in means of a square of maneuver, in the wait that the force ratio concurs to give a sense of stabilization of the situation in order to reach, as soon as possible, to the offensive from all just and intensely pleaded for "⁽¹⁴⁾.

13) Cfr. telephone call of Gen. Cavallero to Mussolini the 6th at 20:00 "(...) I have sent to call Vercellino. I will give precise orders: if it still has regression mentality if he removes it".

14) DS Comando 9th Army, 1507/op. dated 7.12.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Soddu answered with a personal letter in which, after an approval of courtesy for the explanations, was clinching the disapproval in depth for the mental guideline that he attributed to Vercellino:

"(...) I ask to decide but to consider the damage that can have in the mind of the dependent to frame a succession of retreats in the term "square of maneuver".

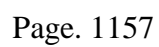
It is necessary that every commander is oriented only when indispensable to the painful necessity of a regression, with the mind to protect the collected and to the fatality of a maneuver not to complete, than for his same fate he must lead of course to his realization and of which the regression in course constitutes only an episode⁽¹⁵⁾.

On 9 December the Greek 17th Inf. Div. attacked, towards noon, the left of the *Venezia* (Mt. Kalaze) and the joint between the *Venezia* and *Arezzo* (sketch n. 58). On the Kalaze the fight continued with alternate vicissitudes without positive results for the enemy; instead on the Kosica at first a bending of the line was cancelled with hard work, with a counterattack delivered by two cc.nn. Bn. and the elements of infantry who the commander of the *Arezzo* succeeded to put together. To the worries manifested by the Gen. Arisio: *"I do not have available but only one camicie nere Bns. stop our losses were sensitive"*, Gen. Vercellino confirmed to maintain the positions at all costs.

But the Greek III Corps was tired, and the combats, facts of onslaught and counter assault with pauses and irregular intervals, for the tenacity of the resistance of the Italian units, for the hard work that weighed also on attacking, for the persistent of the bad weather, to weaken. Seen the atmospheric conditions, let alone the difficulties in the employment of the automatic arms, the greater part of which did not work more for the mud and the earth that the parts had mobile blockade, on 10 December, after the visit of Papagos to Korça, Gen. Tsolakoglou ordered the 17th Inf. Div. to suspend the efforts and to consolidate on the positions reached, leaving instead the 9th Inf. Div. the task to resume, in the limits of its possibilities and after a convenient pause, the penetration in mass of the Kamia.

15) DSCSF AA, f. 1912/op. dated 8.12.1940. At the same time, Gen. Soddu prepared copy of the correspondence elapsed on the issue, in order to inform Gen. Cavallero on his return to Tirana, emphasizing in the cover letter (f. 2153/op. dated 9,12,1940) to have put in evidence the danger of: *"to orient the mind of the dependent to the fatality of renunciations when they are not imposed with the arms at hand"* and *"to transport in the truth of a war and a at all special situation in any respect it generates by the maneuvers of Major unit - for how much perfect - in their theoretical conceptions"*.

LO SCHIERAMENTO DEL III CORPO D'ARMATA IL 10 DICEMBRE



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

While the Italian III Corps resisted to the best of one's ability, in the sector of the XXVI the previewed regression was carried out without substantial worries, exception made for the right wing (sketch n. 59). The Scrugli grouping, of the *Piemonte*, was continuing its *distress*, in a sour atmosphere and hostile to which the units - constituted nearly entire from personnel of the southern regions of Italy - were totally unprepared psychologically, physically and materially. The movement backwards must have begun on the 5th, in company groups. Then the abandonment of the line could not have place neither the 5th, nor the 6th, nor 7 December because the Greeks attacked and because he was not still available the support of the I Bn. of the G.d.F. or the 164th cc.nn. Bn., both in arrival but for partial and missing much material. Moreover the Devoli, over flowing for plentiful rains, had become in fordable and the preparation of footbridges or man bridges demanded to the detriment of time to of the quick inflow of reinforcements. The suffering of the rests of the *Piemonte*, than between the 5th and the 7th had had the 34 cases of freezing, become hardest. Col. Scrugli signaled during the withdraw in the torments (8 December):

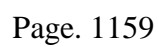
"13:00 hours *stop* another three died for cold to the III Bn. *stop* total twelve in the day *stop* today remaining troop & official many sufferers *stop* I act however with maximum energy *stop* far firewood (...)"

and the 9th at midnight, after new Greek attacks on Mali Çipes and after another ten mortal cases of cold and a hundred of freezing: .

"Of my guards only 18 remaining *stop* my stump line up north ridge of Gremsh *stop* with remaining troops Paoli & Leggio & 270th will organize the west ridge of Varr i Lamit north Lumi Kucit *stop* indescribable situation *stop* give me reinforcements".

To the extreme south of the army things went still worse. The commander of the III Bn. G.d.F., thinking himself surrounded asks to congeal all his residual forces on Gostanghës and of being able to withdraw, if forced, on Q. Devris, approximately two kilometers more to north, then was silent. The next day, after a long silence, Col. Scrugli communicated that the battalion turned out dispersed and that only a few men were resolutions join him. The welding with the 11th Army was skipped.

The real consistency of the 9th army, without to consider reinforcements and the complements in transfer travel, were the following: III Corps with approximately 16,000 men, XXVI with 8,800 men, troops of the army equal to 1,500 men.



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

As operating instrument was not sure much valid: if on the paper someone will want to count *six divisions*, the numerical calculation supplies an entirety break down, not homogenous and tired out of 27,000 combatants diluted on about seventy of kilometers online of air of semicircular front (16).

On the Front of the XXVI Corps the K divisions group was found, remained with the 10th Inf. Div. articulated on three complexes of forces. The perspectives that the continuous small initial tactical success were not being avoided at the SAMO, which on 8 December ordered a reshuffling of the forces: the K group remained to disposition as simple organ of command, while the 10th Inf. Div. passed to the direct dependencies of the same SAMO with the task to push itself along the ways of facilitation marked by the valleys of the Devoli and the Tomorreces towards Elbasan let alone to cover the left of the III Corps and the right of the II. The 13th Inf. Div., in reserve, had to be kept ready to feeding the progression of the 17th or the 10th division. The provision evidently appeared endured little answering because two days after it came restored the previous ordering of the K group with the 10th Inf. Div. and non divisional elements under the orders of Gen. Demestikas, in place of Gen. Kosmas who had assumed the command of the II Corps.

While Vercellino supplied to the two most urgent problems. First of all the organization of Librazhd, to the northeast of Elbasan: on order of the Comando Superiore they were passed to the dependencies of employment of the 9th Army the three works with the already existing obstruction - is worth to say Librazhd, Zgozhde and Strebilova - and, since in the zone of Librazhd the *Piemonte* was being reconstituted, this was in charge of the studies and the predispositions inherent to the defensive systemizing of the

16) The Greek official relation writes: "*the adversary (...) concentrated on its position of advanced resistance huge forces with unjustified, could itself be said, density of troops. In fact from the lake of Ohrida (...) for a front of five km he had the 4th bersaglieres, the remains of the "Parma", 48th the "Taro" division, the 53rd division "Arezzo" and more to the west, in the high valleys of the Skumbini, the 19th division "Venezia" and the 36th division "Forli"*" (vol. III, page 194). It is not specified which given the described situation refers, however from the context it would seem to be a matter itself of 10-15 December. Hour, 12 December, from the lake Mt. Kosica (six kilometers online of air) was found: the XXVI and XXIX Bn. of the 4th bers. (800 men); the II/49th *Parma* (400 men); the I/208th *Taro* (350 men); 163rd Bn. cc.nn. (400 men); 207th Inf. *Taro* (850 men); the I/84th *Venezia* (200 men); the II/83rd *Venezia* (400 men); the III/3rd *Piemonte* (200 men); the III/84th *Venezia* (400 men); the III/4th *Piemonte* (300 men); the II/84th *Venezia* (400 men) for a total of 4,700 men. In sector reserve there were: the 26th Bn. cc.nn. (300 men); 116th Bn. cc.nn. (400 men) and 167th Bn. cc.nn. (400 men), for a total of 1,100 men. Altogether, therefore, it was a matter of 5,800 combatants. For how much it concerns the *Forli*, the citation is wrong because it reached in Albania first of February 1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

strong points. Then, but much more serious, the issue of the val Tomorreces (sketch n. 60). If the extreme right of the 9th Army with the loss of the feature Mali i Çipes - Gostanghës had been forced to collect itself towards the north ridge of Varr i Lamit, the extreme left of the 11th army had withdrawn in the Osum valley constituting a defensive flank in front of Çerevodë.

For arrival, the line came to constitute a most delicate salient with apex to Mali Mietë, easy trapped from Dushari, occupied by the Greeks, and the head of the Tomorreces. Moreover the left flank remained uncovered of the 11th Army, because the free availability of Q. Devris concurred with the enemy to go around the defense of Çerevodë coming down the Osum valley.

In effects, all the right of the XXVI Corps was in crisis: the Edolo Bn., hinge of the salient, had reduced to 180 men the units of the 3rd infantry *"is not more in conditions, for the degree of physical prostration and moral when they arrive, to resist to an attack of the adversary"*. And the Greek 10th division had begun the attack, to confirmation of the symptoms find from our intelligence. To north against the 6th alpine infantry acted the 68th; to the center against the 5th alpine, from Dushari towards Varr i Lamit, the 30th infantry; to south the Papakostantino detachment which it was becoming the tip of diamond of the Greek effort in the zone. Watching in difficulty against the defense of the *Parma* sector, Gen. Gozis, who had just replaced Gen. Dromazos in the command of the division, reinforced it with the I/68th, the II/30th and a group of artillery, therefore to altogether bringing it to five battalions and two groups: little less than one Italian binary division; more of the double quantity of the forces that the Commander of the *Parma* had to his disposition for interdict the long descending valley of the Tomorreces.

The weak point of the defense, in part the conditions of the troops, was just the salient of Mali Mietës. In fact the K group Commander, on precise telephone order of the Greek Supreme Command, decided that the 10th division with the a grande movement a long the Dushari-Zhepa director in order to cut outside all the *Parma* sector, pressing the front from the Papakostantino detachment, that extended its action to Q. Devris. Q. Devris was an interrogative point. The 11th Army had decided that the *Pusteria* send a company to the pass, where would have had to meet one company of the 9th Army. Then, on one side was not possible to know with certainty if the company of the *Val Fella* Bn. effectively had arrived to Q. Devris, from the other the XXVI Army Corps informed that without the contribution of fresh mountain battalions

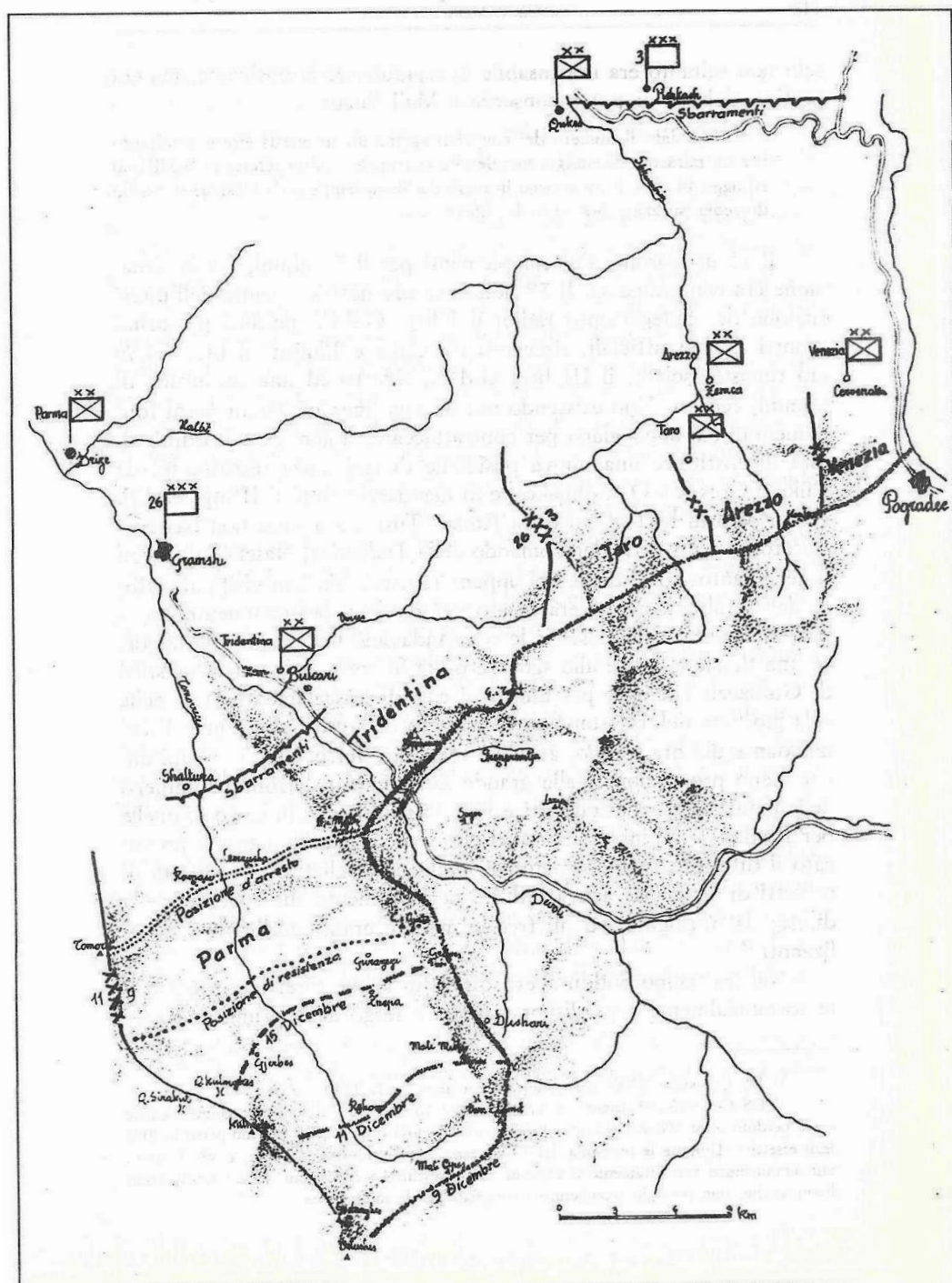
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 347

The operations of the 9th Army from the 9 to 17 December

Schizzo n. 60

LE OPERAZIONI DELLA 9^a ARMATA DAL 9 AL 17 DICEMBRE



The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

it was not only unthinkable to reach the position, but it was even doubt of being able to conserve the Mali Sogor:

"(...) given the number of frozen abandoned in these days is only for a miracle of moral energy that the troops have been kept on their feet until today. In case of an attack in forces from Shenpremtja or Dushari is risked to see broken in an hour all the defense (...)" ⁽¹⁷⁾.

On the 15th arrived the complements of 450 from the 5th alpine, but the situation was compromised. The 5th did not give more news because of the interruption of the radio connection; the I G.d.F. Bn, lost in the first official various action, withdrew from Çuka and Liqerit; the Edolo Bn. remained isolated; the III G.d.F. Bn, reduced to about sixty men, yielded. Not existing neither one more fundamental line neither any hinges which to lean itself in order to counterattack, Gen. Nasci then ordered to constitute one new position of rear resistance, from Çuka and Greves to Q. Kulmakes, and to send to at once the II G.d.F. Bn. and a pair of battalions of the *Parma*. However it was still not enough. Went to Han, headquarters of the Commander of the *Tridentina*, Nasci conferred with Gen. Santovito, which as soon as he had returned from a visit to the sector of the 5th alpine, where had gone in order to personally become acquainted of the course of the things. And the things went badly, much to impose a bending, beyond to the evacuation already in course of the logistics center of Gurazezi: the more and more numerous cases of freezing (120 in the single day of the 15th) added to the number of the wounded, between which the commander of the Edolo Bn., had rendered the effectives of the 5th alpine still less proportionate to the great extension of the front; the employment of ammunitions for machine-gun modified Fiat 35, in place of those for the Breda 37, and the anti-freeze oil insufficiency had provoked the defective operation of many machine-guns; the lack of shells for the artillery had influenced negatively on the effectiveness of the defense; the torments and the icy cold was quite paralyzing⁽¹⁸⁾

In the meantime Soddu had circulated its directives n. 6 addressing substantially to predispose work to the rear of the front line for

17) DS Command XXVI Corps, letter s.n. dated 14.12.1940.

18) DS Command 9th army, f. 1795/op. dated 16.12.1940 - the *Vestone* battalion alone had lost more than 300 men by freezing. The New G.d.F. Bn.; they had lost 30% of the effectives. During the torments of the 17th had been had beyond 300 frozen, and more than one hundred mules were died for exhaustion or falling in the freeze. The conditions of the 6th alpine was dramatic, not being able to clear frozen for the much snow.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to allow with the units therein the lines to fight fiercely without worries of risen in this order of ideas must have immediate beginning relative studies and preparations to the obstructions of Librazhd (Skumbi valley) and of the confluence the Devoli - Tomorreces (Devoli valley) for the 9th Army and of Q. Dardhes (to north of the Tomori, connecting Tomorreces valley with the Osum valley), of Çerevodë (Osum valley), of Klisura (Deshnices valley), Tepeleni (Vojussa valley) and the Port of Palermo for the 11th Army, all with functions of control respect to eventual infiltrations and collection of the flowed forces, let alone of those withdrawn from the line for the rearrangement They, predisposed astride of the main communications, constituted only defensives elements in depth against a local yielding and, in second request, they could be considers as skeleton of a new defensive position. Between all that one of Librazhd both assumed particular value is in connection with the way of penetration that and it blocked as a strong points of the defensive slip road Librazhd-Strebilova, destined to maintain the support to the border Yugoslavian also in case of a new regression of the 9th Army. As it has been seen, the works of Librazhd had been entrusted to the *Piemonte*; the obstruction of the Devoli confluence - Tomorreces, determined to Bulcari-Shaltura, instead was assigned to the XXVI Corps. Now, the withdraw of the right of the 9th Army had widened the separation between the two Armies with obvious consequences and it became therefore urgent and necessary to re-establish the contact and to ask for the possibility of an encircling of the 11th Army in the Osum valley. Soddu took part, basing his reasoning on the arrival of fresh units⁽¹⁹⁾: the 9th Army had to bring back the joint at Q. Kulmakes immediately; then, with the first battalions available of the *Cuneense*, to go back to the high Tomorreces vallies in order to connect itself to Q. Devris with the small garrison of the 11th Army. Subsequently, the rest of the *Cuneense* arrived and the reinforced Osum valley, the action could be developed in order to retake Gostanghës-Mali Velushes. General Vercellino, in giving the consequent dispositions, fixed the terms of the defensive order of the XXVI Corps: on the alignment. Çuka and Gjate-Q. Kulmakes the axis of the resistance position, with the units of the *Parma* to interdict the valley

19) The *Cuneense* (Gen. Ferrero) had arrived and was disembarking the *Acqui* (Gen. Mariotti.). Moreover the C.S.F.A.A. had demanded the shipment for via airplane to Valona of two mtr. Bns. and via sea to Durazzo of another two cc.nn Bns..

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

and with alpine units in the feature of the ridge between Devoli and Tomorreces like shoulder support;

on the Bregu alignment the Math-Lemnusha-Romasi the line of arrest (or, in order better to say, the containment position), with the necessary elements for the work of first time.

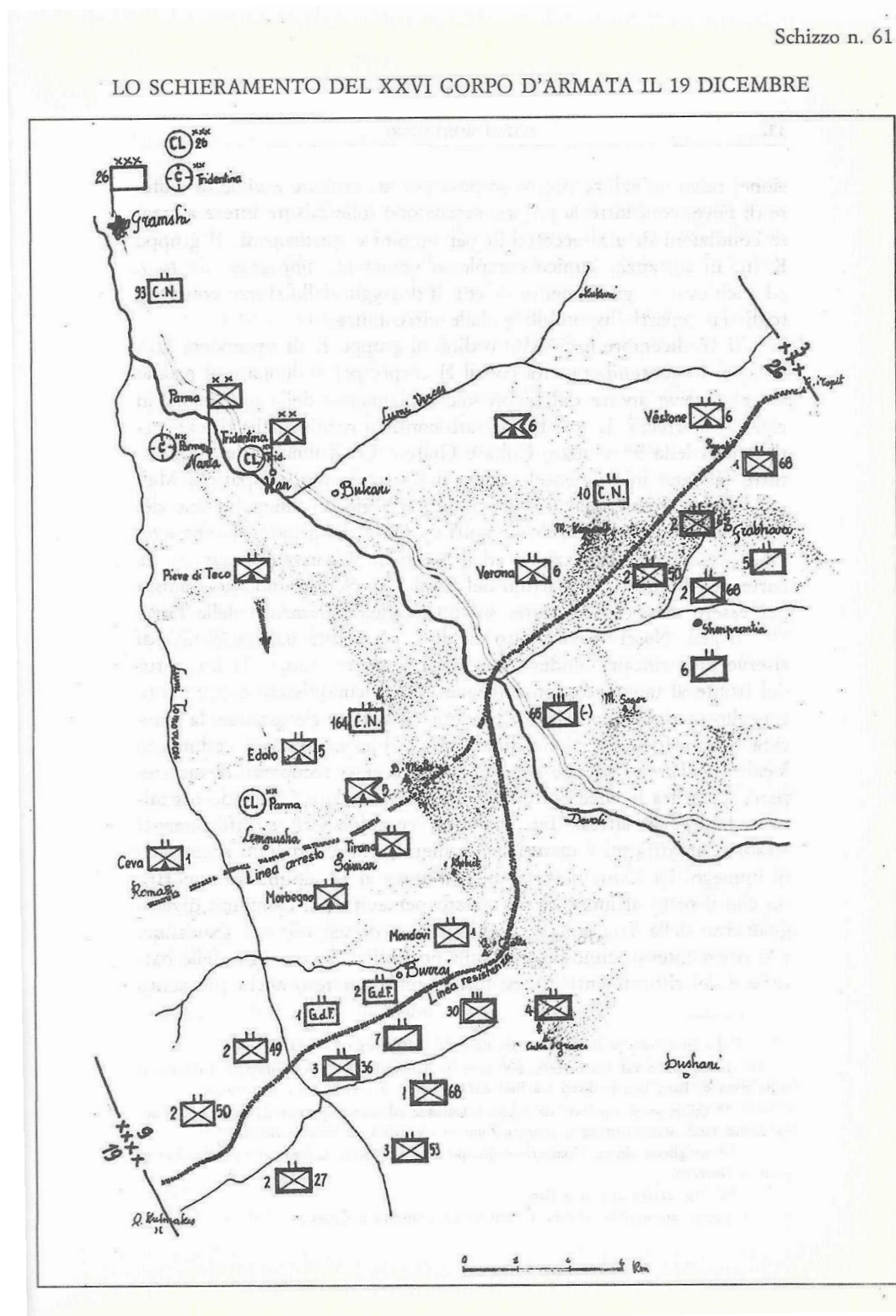
Between 18 and 19 December the device acquired one sure consistency (sketch n. 61). And most difficult to render with efficiency how much the moral factor can affect the reactivity of the front to the hardness of the fight or the climatic conditions and, for against, as it is in a position to provoking continuous energies in painful conditions of life. The arrival of the first battalions of the *Cuneense*, the transit of the long columns of the companies and the alpine batteries, in order, well framed; the substitution of the 5th alpine and the withdrawal of the *Piemonte*, the most tried unit; all that was sufficient because in between twenty-four hours of rest *Tirano* and the *Morbegno* (the *Edolo* was by now the shadow of if same) retook the normal tone, if not the material efficiency. At 11:30 of the 19th gen. Soddu held relationship to the two Army commanders at Rrogozhinë. It was strongly taken care of, as well as for the Tomorreces valley - where the things went improving also because the *Feltre* Bn moved from Q. Devris had reached Gostanghës -, how much for the breakthrough that the Greeks were resolutions to realize towards Sushica valley threatening Valona. He had telephoned Mussolini and Gen. Cavallero, in Rome, manifesting its doubts on the possibility to resolve the crisis. The following evening the Chief of the S.M. General, returned to Albania, still convened at Rrogozhinë the commanders of the Army: was dealing with a injection confidence, with the illustration of the program of the next arrivals of the reinforcements and of the information on the enemy supplied from the S.I.M. that put in clean evidence as also the Greeks were hardly tested.

That also on the Greeks the difficulty of the combats was made to feel was certain, but is also true that the numerical superiority allowed them the change of the divisions online and that deciding of the initiative it allowed to attack where and when they wanted and to suspend the fight when thought opportune. As an example, the 17th division, that on the first of December it had replaced the 13th, remained in defensive attitude until 25 December. Worn away by actions of patrols and above all from the winter, the 26th came in its turn replaced from the 13th that in the meantime, during the rest, it had been restored in its efficiency, thanks to the arrival of complements, and reinforced with the 13th reconnaissance group and unit of artillery. the 9th division,

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 351

The alignment with the XXVI Army Corps 19 December



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

but an action soon suspended for continuous and violent snow storms, it concentrated the own attention on the measures understandings to create acceptable living conditions for men and draft animals. The K group was, in short, the only mass truly engaged *in toto*, and also - just - with the dosage of the effort allowed from the units available and the circumstances.

On 16 December the SAMO ordered to the K group to resume the offensive, in cooperation with the II Corps, in order to develop to the best perspectives opened from the favorable development of the operations in the Tomorreces valley. The action was delivered against the hinges of the southern defense of the 9th Army, Çuka and Gjata and Q. Kulmakes, but above all (at least initially) against the feature from Mali Pupatit to Mali i Komjanit, held from the 6th alpine. In order more days, until to the end of the month, the heated actions were carried out part of the K group, that it had assumed the denomination and the rank of V Army Corps, and from part of the defenders. The morning of the 23 the Gen. Soddu went to Gramshi for being put to the current, on the place, of the course of the fight.

Gen. Nasci had much to say. The absolute unavailability of reserves and support rendered necessary to remove troops from a feature of the front at the engaged moment in order not to retake with counter assault elsewhere lost position: in such circumstances, the success lacked the dynamics reaction would have widened the local yielding. The *Parma* was such only in name: it urged to recover its units scattered between the other divisions and put them under their organic Command and also urged to make to reach extraordinary complements and supply of arms and materials in order to put it in acceptable conditions of employment. The *Cuneense* for now was limited to the alpine: it was opportune that the rest flowed very soon in order avoiding the complete bleeding white of the *Tridentina* ⁽²⁰⁾. The deficiency of baggage train was seriously and reflected harmfully on the possibility of transport by pack animal of the batteries and the supply. This last one badly was rendered still acute

20) the situation of the *Cuneense* to the date of 22 December was the following:

- 1st alpine: in Tomorreces valley; 600 mules in march from Durazzo to Gramshi, remaining in the Bari zone; services divided between Bari and Durazzo;
- 2nd alpine: air-transported from Foggia to Durazzo and truck transported from Durazzo to Valona; without mules, cartage, motor vehicles; reduced equipments of unit;
- 4th mountain artillery: Command and *Pinerolo* group still at Bari; *Mondovì* group in part at Durazzo;
- IV engineers Bn.: still at Bari;
- services: truck company still at Bari; baggage train still at Cune.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

from the enormous length of the supply and evacuation routes. The situation in the Tomorrecës valley was in the balance and in order to lighten it an action had been programmed on Q. Kulmakës from part of the *Parma*.

Gen. Soddu could not press them in the flank and promised the allocation of two alpine Bns.

The Greek offensive became more and more ordained and threatening. The constitution of a great logistics center at Voskopoje (served by good roads that connected it with Korça) and the improvement of the mule tracks until to Protopapa placed the Greeks in a position to making to flow quickly troops and supplies and of feeding the effort against the northern wing of the *Pusteria*, whose *Feltre* Bn. had been rejected from Gostanghes towards Çerevode leaving the pass towards Mali Kulmakës, coming from on the ridge between Devoli and Tomorrecës. For how much all the penetrations that occasionally were taken place here and here gradually were cancelled by furious combats, lead body to body from the battalions of and the 6th alpine, it was not possible to arrest the Greek progression: On 29 December Çuka and Gjatë fell, then the next day yielded Maja and Korbiet and Bregu i Math was invested. At 15:00 of the 30th, insistently presses from Gen. Santovito via the opportunity to retreat on line of Bregu i Math - decision to take with urgency, since where assumed lately could compromise the fate of the *Pieve di Teco e Mondovì* Bn., whose left was by now seriously threatened - , Gen. Nasci requested the authorization to carry the defense on the blocking position, the suffering the withdraw of all the obstruction of the Tomorrecës valley. - He explained also that the only paper anchor to risk was the *Ceva* Bn., although tried from combat of Natale at Q. Kulmakës, but that was not absolutely the case to sacrifice it completely in the attempt to retake the lost positions. Vercellino objected not to be able to grant the *placet* demanded, without to in its turn have obtained it from the Comando Superiore. He telephoned at once to Tirana asking for new reinforces, but Cavallero removed every illusion:

"Cavallero: (...)We do not have any alpine Bns. available. The last one has been given to De Cia ⁽²¹⁾.

I do not have the Bn. to give you. The 2nd alpine is all engaging in val Sushica and holds on with its teeth. The *Lupi* division, that begins to arrive tomorrow, must go to Berat (at Klisura the situation is worrisome).

The *Vai Pescara* has gone into the line and I do not have anything in order to replace them. The complements the first for 7-8 days are not here. Earn you time I cannot?

21) Commander of the *Pusteria* mountain division.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Vercellino:

Cavallero: You feel, Vercellino: you be judge. But before deciding a regression you see that it is indispensable (...) ⁽²²⁾.

At 17:00 Vercellino communicated to Nasci: "*I authorize to do as the situation advises. In relation to the meager forces that you have at your disposition, if you think to withdraw on the arrest line, are authorized do make it*" ⁽²³⁾. At 20:00 the Commander of the XXVI Corps circulated the withdraw order.

That day had been an other event of note: at dawn Gen. Cavallero had assumed the Comando Superiore of the Armed Forces of Albania, having keep the burden as the head of the S.M. General.

3. OPERATIONS BETWEEN THE TOMORI AND THE STRAKAVEC (11th ARMY).

On 5 December the commander of the 11th army ordered the continuation of the maneuver in order to occupy the resistance position Port Palermo – Kurvelesh – Strakavec – Dhembel - Qarish VeluShës, arranging that the movement was carried to conclusion within the night of the 7th. The rearguards had to only leave the line of contact to the attainment of the defensive new position from part of the bulk of the G.U. and opposing successive resistances in correspondence of the ways of facilitation, if necessary to the ends of a greater gain of time. For executed how much with troops, arrived to an extreme degree of fatigue, the regression was carried out with substantial regularity under the protection of the rearguards, that stopped nearly two days at Paliokastro in val Dhrinos and the long grip of Pigerasi coast ⁽²⁴⁾.

The state of efficiency of the units had been illustrated from Geloso to Cavallero the morning of 6 December:

"(...) To the left there is the *Pusteria* with four Bn. without baggage train (takes advantage of but those of *Bari*). The baggage train of the *Pusteria* are arriving at Valona.

22) Diary Cavallero, dated 30.12.1940.

23) DS Command XXVI Army Corps, date 30.12.1940.

24) "Memo to have completed a feature of march with elements of the *Ferrara* - Gen Geloso wrote. - while from the Radati saddleback he withdrew on the line of Giorgucat, not far from Dervisciani; they did not have that makes more warm food mess from 28 October; many instead of the pants, had threaded the legs in sandbags and replaced the shoes with bandaging of material and rope. I do not complain, not a curse. The squares and the platoons, of which for the lack of it graduates to you and of officials fallen on the simple field soldiers had assumed the command, marched fast and dignified (...)".

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The 5th Alpine art. rgt. it has the materials but it still does not have mules that will come 5-6 days before that it is complete and it can reach position. The *Bari* have lost all. The 8th alpine have lost 80%, the 9th alpine have lost less. The I Btg. *Vicenza* and the *Aquila* are involved heroically. There is from kissing the land where they have put their feet. The *Julia* is shabby but continuous to fight. *Three valle battalions are still not totally worn away but they do not have baggage train.* The regiments of infantry 41st and 42nd are tired, especially the 41st (...)" (25).

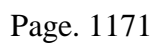
The demands concerned on the complements and the main supply. For first, it was most urgent to have the four organic battalions already prepared at Bari for the *Ferrara*, reduced to the finished minimums; then the complements for the *Julia* and in third request those for the *Bari*; finally remaining. All had to arrive to the complete of equipments of individual and unit. In the logistic field ("*the greater disorganization is in the services*") was necessary trucks for the army, inasmuch as it had hardly ninety, including those in repair, and mountain trucks for the *Pusteria*. Also in the field of ammunitions the availabilities were reduced to little or nothing, hand grenades, unfoc for guns and automatic arms and average unfoc for artilleries. "*In present conditions the 11th Army it can still resist eight days, without to exclude greater duration*".

Of all the alignment of the army, the northern wing, from the Tomori to Klisura, represented the more vulnerable part and very weak. Outlining topography of the region (sketch 62) is easy to characterize the possibilities that they are offered to the defender against the natural lines of penetration supplied from the course the north-west south-east of the topographic folds: to east the Tomori, sturdy defensive flank, and to the West the Kurvelesh, southern margin of the plateau system, between which as drawn of connection there is the furrow of Tepeleni - Klisura, dug in the heart of the fold of the Nemercke- Trebeshines. The three mighty complex orogenesis cited (Acroceraunia, Nemercke - Trebeshines - Tomori), also introducing in their inside numerous facilitation zones, are however strong elements of obstacle, especially in the winter season. But the system has a constituted reason of weakness insinuating itself between Trebeshines and Tomori of the level land*, relatively practicable, of the Mali Qarishta. The feature intrinsically the least weak is that one correspondent to the existing narrowing in it where the amplitude of the zone of facilitation from approximately 40 km initial

25) Diary Cavallero, date 6.12.1940.

* penepiano

L'ALBANIA SUD-OCCIDENTALE E LE POSSIBILITÀ OPERATIVE GRECHE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

it is reduced to not more than 25 km online of air. Now, all the level land* of the Mali Qarishta, with the two furrows of the Osum and of the Vojussa, it was entrusted to the VIII Cprps, whose supports of wing were represented by the Tomori and the Nemercke, both sturdy but both with a Achille's heel: respective the head of the Kapinova (and the passes towards the Tomorrecës valley) and the Zagorias valley, of which already has been spoken. For the abrupt inflection of the alignment towards north, the position of the Mali Qarishta, northern bastion of the grip of Klisura, turned out to the extremity of a dangerous much vulnerable salient, much more after the conquest from Greek part of the massive of the Ostravica, than it all dominated, and of Q. Kualibardhe. All the zone between Klisura and the Ostravica had provoked serious worries until from the fall of Ersekë, because of its dominion on the valley of the Osum and the Tomorrecës. The importance of the possession of Q. Kualibardhe had been endured just estimated, but the sparsity of troops had not concurred the organization of a defense which the value of the land and the guiding of movement that crossed it would have intentional formed tactical group from Financial polices and Albanian camicie nere, which in the third decade of November had been entrusted the surveillance of the zone, was too much meager a force: to performe true miracles succeeding to reject infiltrations and multiplying themselves with great activity, yes to make to believe much to the enemy of being sturdier than how much it was not; but it could not, as it had been ordered, implant to Q. Kualibardhe a sturdy defensible strong point a long with the few forces in attended of arrival of new units. Such attempt then was definitively prevented from the opposing conquest of the Ostravica, from whose southern slopes Q. Kualibardhe were controlled in radical way. When, after demanded renewed with nagging insistence, began to arrive the *Pusteria* - which lost time because its first elements were assigned to other task - the situation already was compromised. Not there was not even the possibility to improve it with a local counter-offensive of all the division, because it reached in situated groups of battalion without artilleries and baggage train; first they arrived it after some days while of second a share it came much later from Italy and the remaining part remained at the boarding ports.

Yes these circumstances made that, in the moment in which the army was carried on the positions of Tepeleni-Klisura, the *Pusteria* division was deploying between the Mali Qarishta and the Tomori, with the only possibility to block enough to secure the valley of the Osum, without however improving the alignment, especially its right where

* penepiano

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Julia held the Fratarit. On the other side, also a local action, conduct with limited forces of the entity of a single division, could not have achieved large results, since the simple one retaking of Q. Kualibardhe to null would have served, of the possession of the hill would have been maintained if the massive of the Ostravica had at the same time not been re-occupied also, operation that demanded forces not available. The problem of the connection between the two armies, which the since beginning had inflicted the most serious blow the fall of Ersekë, could be resolved only from a great head who, deaf to the gasping demands for aids from the front and taking care of the losses of land that consequently and unavoidably they would have been taken place, was successful to collect in the rears a mass of five or six divisions and with a powerful counter-offensive had turned upside down the tactical situation, resolving in such a way also all the crisis. But the great able commanders of decisions of the sort always have been rare in the history of the wars and for more, for being able to take them; they must have in the hands military direction and political direction of the operations. One and the other was instead very far, from Rome, where it was not comprised as the Greek offensive still had not been demolished and from where it was insisted in nagging way because term to the advance of the adversary was placed and it was reached to a relationship of stable equilibrium. Of other part - and above all - it was not succeeded to create in Italy a suitable organization to make to arrive in Albania with solicitude, in order and complete major unit of reinforcements, neither was succeeded to realize an participation of the mass of aviation.

On 10 December, therefore, the 11th armed was lined up, from left to right, with the VIII Corps with three alpine divisions and a group between Q. Devris and Zagorias valley; with the XXV Corps with three divisions and some mountain battalions from called valle to the Sushica valley. The *Siena* division and some cc.nn. battalions from the Sushica valley to the sea. Online only six divisions were found, since the *Centauro* had been withdrawn into the second line, also continuing to make part of the XXV Army Corps. The three regiments of cavalry, terribly worn away from along period of uninterrupted employment during which exceptionally lavished, represented the first nucleus of an army reserve. The positions, but to the left, as it has been said were naturally strong; on the whole, still excessively wide for the troops available but the length of the front turned out reduced more than a third. The work completed between the last of November and first of December, for how many culverts with great alacrity, did not have

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

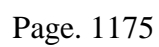
conferred to the land that accommodations totally rudimentary: some first draft of trench in the more important points, reticulated to hedge simple triangular on the easiest ways than communication, strong points here and there as soon as traced. The substance still lacked and that is entrenchments, emplacements, communication trenches, shelters, roads. On mounts the snow had fallen in abundance, the biting cold, the first cases of freezing had come to increase the uneasiness of the troops. It was necessary not only to put itself in a position to resisting to the attacks of the enemy, but also making to reach the soldier the indispensable in order bear the inclemency of the season and the rigidity of the climate; for allow not only fighting but also to work in order to grab hold of the land solidly, to provide themselves of a shelter and to cook the mess, what that for very many was not more happened from the beginning of the campaign. On many positions, and especially on mountains, the Golico and the Kurvelesh, it was necessary to send also the firewood to burn. And what more was the lack of the means of transport: the truck and the mule.

The Greek attack, in order to open a road towards the inside of Albania, but mainly in order to strike the Italian armies, was carried out in December astride of four guide lines: that one of the Osum - Tomorrecës, zone of contact between the 9th and the 11th armies; the Vojussa - Deshnicës, with Klisura like first objective; the Dhrinos - Vojussa, with Tepeleni as immediate objective; the Sushica valley, that allowed to go around the defense of the Kurvelesh and Logora, insinuating itself towards the Vojussa lowland.

The success on the first two guide lines would have separated the armies and opened the way on Berat along the course of the Osum, while liberating the Tomorrecës valley would have allowed to go around the grip of Devoli putting in most critical situation the 9th Army. The conquest of Tepeleni, beyond to having great resonance, would have, with the advance in Sushica valley, given to the Greeks the control of the roadstead of Valona, one of two lungs of the Italian army group. The Greeks attacked at the same time along all the four guide lines: here, united to the resistance of the defenders, the main reason for which in no point they succeeded to achieve tactical success of such importance to concur strategic developments.

The information on the Greek device was sufficiently exact, at least for how much concern the number of major unit. Imprecision instead was subsisting on the identification of the divisions, because of the frequent change of dependency of the units (sketch n. 6). At the beginning of the battle of arrest the force ratio was of 2 to 1,

GLI SCHIERAMENTI CONTRAPPOSTI SUL SETTORE DELL'11^a ARMATA
L'8 DICEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to favor of the Greeks; to the 26 attacking regiments of infantry⁽²⁶⁾ if of set against 13 Italians, of which at least eight already harshly tried by the begin offensive and from the withdraw. The total superiority was therefore remarkable for the adversary, but insufficient in order to determine a decisive victory on a wide front, victory in order to reach which would have been necessary to direct the effort, with the more important mass and one truly conspicuous superiority, only on one or two guide lines the operating ones. The Greek Supreme Command, also knowing our weakness, and having sure know instinctively the particular strategic value of some guide lines - especially those of the Osum and the Vojussa - Deshnicës -, did not know to realize some maneuver with the reserves that were flowing and subdivided in the almost uniform way on all the front, with the consequence to allow with the defense to resist everywhere, also abandoning some stretch of land, and especially to donate them the time to receive reinforces from Italy.

For the 11th Army it dealt with, for the moment, to very soon organize to the defensive new position, however it was absolutely necessary to avoid emerged the static and passive attitude, more or less frequently, in the previous phase. Being possible the resource to offensive actions of also is not reduced dimension, was prescribed a continuous employment of combat and security patrols, than with the goal of watching the front and the flanks of the units, above all in the nocturnal hours, had to reach the result to more stimulate the aggressiveness of the equipped elements.

The VIII Corps had the responsibility of the obstruction of the valley of Osum and the contemporary contact with the 9th Army, let alone of the defense of Vojussa and of Klisura valley, with relative welding to the XXV Corps. The central feature of the front was defined from the positions of left side of t. Ambum, supports to the buttresses northern of the Mali Qarishta. Every field was entrusted to one division: the *Pusteria* (four Bn.) to north, the *Bari* (seven Bns.) to south and the *Julia* (seven Bn.) in median position as hinge. To *Bari* it followed a small independent field assigned to the *Pizzi* grouping (two Bn.) for the defense of the Zagorias valley (sketch n. 64). On nearly all the line several the masses of forces, even if intermingled, had in sure way assumed a operating appearance; instead between Osum and Tomorrecës the action of arrest was always at the sea top because the *Pusteria*

26) Cfr. Greek S.M.E., op. cit., vol. III, page. 277 and following.

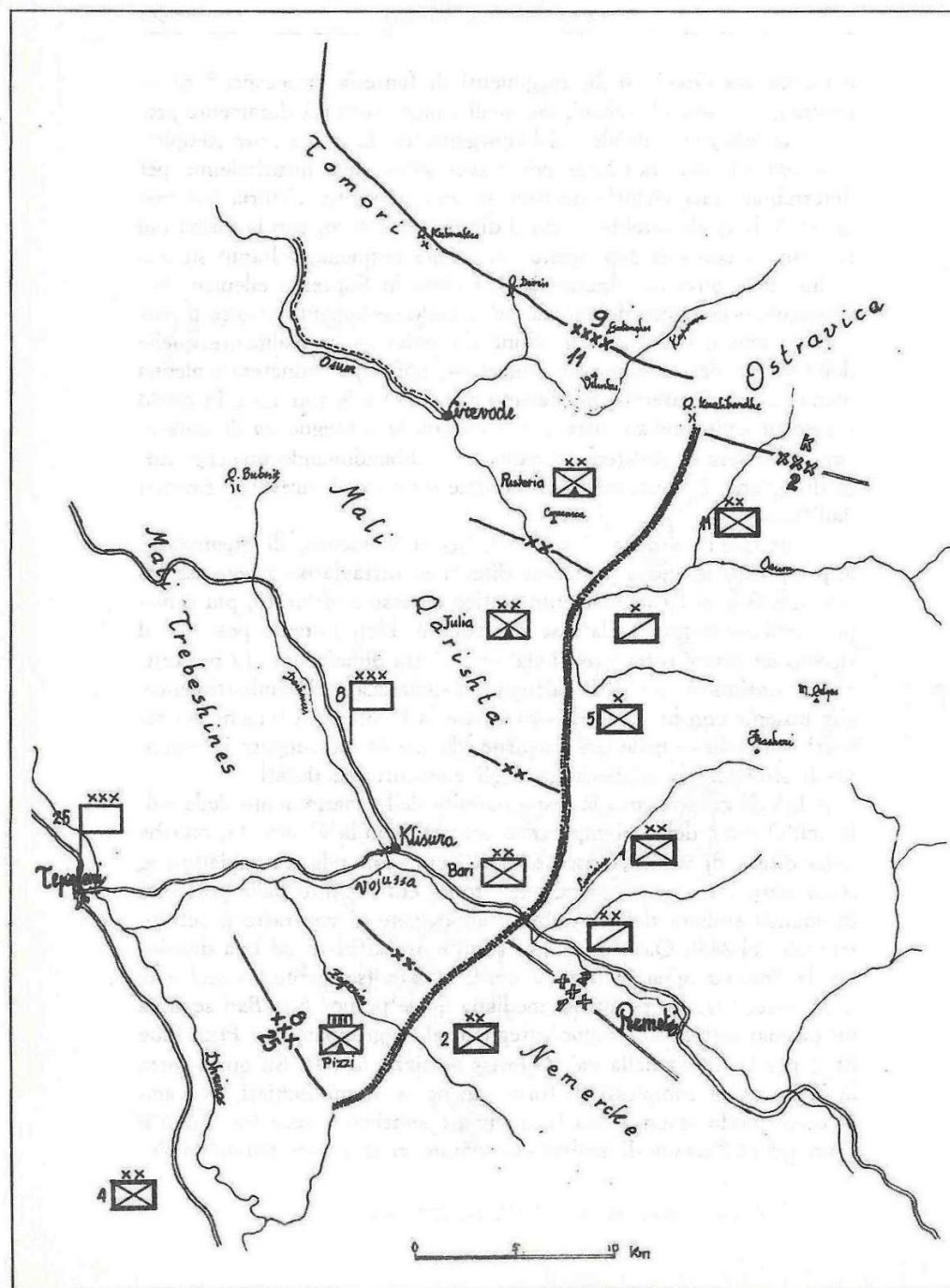
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 362

The sector of the VIII Army Corps (7 December)

Schizzo n. 64

IL SETTORE DELL'VIII CORPO D'ARMATA (7 DICEMBRE)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

it was still moving its battalions slowly. On 4 December between Mali VeluShës and Coprensca was only the 7th alpine with the *Cadore* and *Feltre* Bns., beyond the residual ne of the *Salvoni* detachment: decidedly too much little. To add that the passes on which ran the limit of responsibility between 9th and 11th Armies (Gostanghës, Q. Devris, Q. Kulmakes), and for the possession of which orders for a ten of days will be followed, will not give never some safety, are for the precariousness of the occupation – small units isolated with connections that vary uncertain -, are because both armies grew tall with difficulty until to those positions, with a supported device extremely diluted and to the void, are finally because having to withdraw under the continuous enemy pressure they fatally will withdraw to sides of the Tomori, stretching - at least initially - to form simple flanks defensives. In order to resolve the issue it will be necessary a different ordering of the defense. In order to face the situation with as much as was available on the moment, Gen. Bancale ordered general De Cia to assume the command of the Osum sector, with the task of oppose any enemy attempt to come down along the valleys: *"your action must be imprinted on the audacity with violent counterattacks and as much as possible in mass"*.

Of the front of the Italian VIII Corps there was the Greek II Corps and, in Zagorias valley, part of the I Corps. Gen. Papadopoulos, commander of the II C.A., had received the assignment to advance along the Mali Qarishta in order to interrupt from north the roadway of the valley bottom Premeti – Klisura - Berat, then to get hold of the Trebeshines with turning action covering the right flank. In estimating the Italian situation did not have uncertainties:

"the enemy struck on the Frasheri - Premeti positions and rejected to north of the alignment Q. and Korces (Ciaf and Micianit) - Mali i Radomit, does not seem to have the possibility to oppose resistance on the heights of Taronine and Fratarit [Mali Qarishta] that protected neither the Klisura nor block the way for Berat. On the adversary puts into effect them positions has line up several units put entirety, hastily lacking in means of transport, the remainder of units dissolved as a result of previous combats, or airborne units from Italy to Valona and here carried in convoy. With these forces the enemy has tried to constitute a defensive line on the Ostravice – Frasheri - Premeti alignment, but it is not successful. In the sector of Leshnja [head of the Tomorrecës] the prompt Italian commander distressingly the shipment of aids in order to constitute a front that covers the accesses the valleys of Tomorrecës"⁽²⁷⁾.

27) *Ord. op. n. 8. Greek Cfr. S.M.E. op. cit., vol. 111, app. 12.*

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

therefore he decided for advance in tune with the army corps: the 11th division, to the north, had to give protection to the right flank and "to push elements on Taronine"; the 5th brigade to attack in direction Frasherî - Mali Creshovas; the 1st division, more to the south, had to pin on the southern slopes of Qarishta and Fratarit and to progressively replace the cavalry division. The division of cavalry and the brigade of cavalry would be passages into the second formation as soon as possible.

The plan followed the directives of the Greek Supreme Command, but somewhat surprising it not close to consequential between the premise of the order of operation, with which the Italian enemy was given for defender little consisting of weakly organized positions, and the objective: the ridge of the Mali Qarishta. A close objective therefore would have been more reasonable in case than well arranged defense on the land. Probably Gen. Papadopoulos thought his own troops excessive tired. It had asked in fact the Supreme Command a pause for eight - ten days or, in alternative, the reinforcement of a rested division. He had been granted this last (15th Inf. Div.) in substitution of the two worn out brigades. Perhaps recognized the concrete possibility to realize a breakthrough, sure is that was not from the Greek part given up to break off the Italian line, knowing it also slender; a more energetic action in correspondence of the Osum, developed from the 11th Inf. Div. and supported would have been enough from the two brigades first and the 15th Inf. Div. after, in order to open a overwhelming gash between the two Italian armies. In any case it is right to observe that also prudent directives therefore were wide sufficient to put in crisis the left wing of Geloso. The tactical logon between the valleys of the Osum and of the Tomorrecës it is obvious for the offered possibilities of operating development from the passes of Kualibardhe, Gostanghës and Q. Devris, that is from the zone of the heads of the water course Tomorrecës and Kapinova, where ran the uncertain line of contact between the 9th and 11th Armies. It is not difficult to find that the anticipated availability of the *Pusteria* - a ten of days would have been sufficient - would have allowed the solid obstruction of the valleys of the Osum between Q. Tanes and M. Qelqes, with the consequent solid obstruction of the Ostravica and the strong possession of Q. Martes. Unfortunately therefore it was not and of it derived for various weeks a series of bending of the line, with the suspended sword of Damocles drips a breach of the front.

The 11th Inf. Div. attacked on 8 Decembers with its three regiments: 13th,

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

27th and 50th infantry⁽²⁸⁾. The fight manifested was at once hard. At midnight of the 9th Gen. De Cia - than with 2,500 men it held a wide feature 25 km - informed of being forced to withdraw. Col. Psaro, commander of the 7th alpine had fallen. Fallen also three company commanders. The two columns of baggage train, laboriously put entirety for the refueling ammunitions, had been dispersed, with obvious reflection on the feeding of the combat. A company of the *Cadore* lacked every news. Of the front to such picture Gen. Bancale could not that to impose to assure the balance in any case possession of the Çerevodë, watching in special way the exposed flank with the occupation of Q. Devris and Gostanghës, and to accelerate the march of one skimpy battalion of formation, constituted with the collected remainders of the 139th infantry at Berat and, of the groups of the 5th mountain artillery towards those localities. Other was not in a position to making, also because the *Julia* informed of being engaged to the confluence Osum-Ambum in its turn. Gen. Geloso spoke clear:

"Land must be contrasted hand to hand. We have absolute need to earn time in wait for arrival of reinforcements. As to already I have communicated to You that in arrival the division *Acqui* by aircraft and via sea; I mean, before employing it, re-uniting complete of all its means. You must therefore give such time to me. Regulated therefore defensive and alignment employee units holding present absolute necessity maintenance the furrow Klisura- Tepeleni. In the situation puts into effect thinks they necessary must themselves be held secure hold you to your the Mali Topojanit and to connect left with the 9th Army at Gostanghës. Between such ends I leave full maneuver freedom also to cover the Cerevoda saddleback and, I repeat the Klisura- Tepeleni furrow. I confirm to you that in a day be at Berat at your disposition eighth machine-gun battalion and a cc.nn. battalion" ⁽²⁹⁾,

then, in the afternoon, when Gen. Cavallero - returned from Rome in the morning and informed of the events - went to Fieri, where had moved the Command of the 11th Army, illustrated it the situation in the valley of Osum and the constitution of a quick grouping, fixed of reserve communicated, with the three regiments of cavalry (reduced to two thirds party of the effectives), the II and IV /31st tank, two cp. motorcyclists and a group from 75/27 of the 131st artillery. Such group was in way of reunion between Berat and Fieri.

At dawn of the 11th Gen. De Cia represented that the connection to Gostanghës was not realized for the impossibility to reach

28) The three units were in truth groupings of battalions pertaining to various regiments.

29) DS Command 11th Army, tele. 027688/op. dated 10.12.1940, hours 1.2,55.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

and that the average force of every battalion oscillated on the 400 men. In speeding up the *concrete reinforcements* (the Bn. of 139th still had not arrived) asked the urgent resupply via airplane for capes, blankets, pants, shoes and automatic arms of the unit. The worry, absolutely founded, to hold Çerevodë but had provoked the unavoidable thinning of the tactical communication between the *Pusteria* and *Julia* with the result that at 16:15 of the same day, De Cia signaled: "*Strong infiltrations in the zone of the molino Itechies* [on the Osum, about ten of kilometers to the south of Çerevodë]. *Enemy overrunning defense spreads rapidly on the left of Osum*". But also the Greeks had their problems: the losses in men and draft animals were sensitive, the 15th Inf. Div. were late to approach themselves, the supplies were carried out with difficulty, the artillery ammunitions were most insufficient. From 12 December, therefore, the fight weakening quickly on all the local front and, in spite of the incitement of Gen. Papadopoulos, than very became account of the opportunity not to grant truce to the Italian troops, the attack succeeded neither to reach Çerevodë nor Mali Qarishta. The Mali Qarishta, ridge between Osum and Vojussa - Deshnicës, is a mountain lengthened from the thin ridge and the not made easy; that towards the east comes down steep and wooded on the recording of the Ambum torrent, that towards the Deshnicës valley has greater development but it is broken from deep watershed. Determining element was therefore is the crest line that only allows the movement towards north, and of said line the position more important is the Qarishta and Fratarit, attachable relief from the three spurs that are detached. The narrowness of the ridge and the insufficient dominion of fire which had to the rapidity of the spill and the vegetation imposed to the defense to come down in low in order to take advantage of the obstacle of the Ambum. In this zone the *Julia* was found, with the 8th alpine to the north, to confluence Ambum - Osum, and the 9th to the south. The Greek efforts carried in first moment to force the Ambum (9 December), but the successive day a furious counterattack of the *Val Tagliamento* Bn with elements of the *Trento* and the *Gemona*, pushed back so much clearly the attacker and with such losses that no other attempt came more completed in this drawn. At the same time was invested the Qarishta and Fratarit from part of the Greek 1st Inf. Div.: after two days of continuous but sterile pressure the Greeks gave up the pressure, then, also for bad weather and the intense cold, until nearly to Natale in the sector of the *Julia* did not manifest worthy activity of note.

The division was truly in bad conditions. On 2 December,

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

which circumstances had been forced to give the order: the enemy reached until to the Commander of division, the battalions of the 8th separated one from the other, the 9th without ammunitions:

"(...) Mules exhausted die of hunger & cold rendering nearly null possibility of supplying. Officers & troop for fatigue & from eight days deficient feeding & absolute lack warm foods & deficiency clothing do not have any more combative ability. In order to avoid encirclement the rest of the division & remains total collapse has ordered withdraw this evening (...)" ⁽³⁰⁾.

In the following afternoon it wrote personally to Gen. Bancale a long letter, in which he illustrated the level which the *Julia* had come to:

"(...) Consider honest and right to once again represent the state of exhaustion of the insufficient officers, the troop and the draft animals of the units. The 8th alpine have six companies commanded from complement second lieutenants and some have only the commander. The deficiency of the draft animals (8th alpine has an average of 50 mules per battalion of the 270 organic beyond to the regimental baggage train unit that do not exist any more) and their state of exhaustion renders the constant supplying of rations and ammunitions impossible, without to count that it would be necessary to transport clothing, burlaps for awnings and blankets, of which the mass is lacking. Many arms are deteriorated for lack of lubricating and they cannot more work.

The crisis is aggravated from the deficiency of means of connection: to the 8th alpine the stations R 2/3, seven 3 RF C and four RA 1 lack; to the engineer battalion two RF 3 A and one RA 2; and from the lack of topographical maps, with the consequence of errors of units and columns of supply, than sometimes they are returned to the base after a long wandering in the forests.

Honestly I cannot assure that the organic units of the division can bear an further permanence on the line: we have all given until to the extreme limit " ⁽³¹⁾.

To the answer and the appeal of Bancale, he sadly replied still:

"(...) it will be made from part of all the possible one, as fact up to now; but I must once again, for tactical honesty, make present that my troops do not have any more ability than reaction and that does not give therefore some guarantee of resistance; that it could carry to serious consequences also for the contiguous fields " ⁽³²⁾.

From 28 October to 8 December the *Julia* had lost 94 officers and 2,170 non-commissioned officers and troop, half of which of the 8th alpine alone. In artillery fact, it had thirteen pieces and as many were recoverable

30) DS D. Commander alp. Julia, tele 643/op. dated 2.12.1940, hours 2,30.

31) Ibid, f. 676/op. dated 2.12.1940.

32) Ibid, letter dated 3.12.1940.

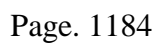
The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

among those inefficient with opportune changes and substitutions of parts. But the hurting point was the issue of the transport of the guns because the draft animals were all nearly unsuitable. Not being able to count on them, the *Julia* resorted to the mountain artillerymen for the transport by on their backs⁽³³⁾.

As far as the defensive position - such so to speak - the movement towards Çerevodë of the *Pusteria* had imposed, as it has been said, the extension of left of the *Julia* towards the north-west (sketch n. 65). Other that had turned out some a thread-like alignment anything but satisfactory, held account of the insufficient level of force of the battalions, none of which exceeded the 600 men, drivers inclusive, of the land much broken and with numerous ridge, and above all of the weakness of the extreme right, the 9th alpine, was pushed on the southern slopes of the Qarishta and Fratarit trying that joint with the *Bari*. The joint that, realized with simple patrols, appeared insufficient before to a serious attack of wedge elements between the two units and that, at the same time with force the light occupation of the ridge of Qarishta and Fratarit, dangerous zone of much minor resistance created on the ridge. A first precautionary provision was assumed deciding the preparation, in care of the engineers corps and divisional, of a series of strong points the withdraws to behind the position of resistance, assigned to contain enemy penetrations. And also true that - as the order came from Rome - all the Commands will insist on the fact that said doubling did not have to make to think next to possibility of further steps back, but the truth advised to preview an evolution of the events not adherent to desires. To leave however from the results of the combat, existed a strong obstacle to the realization of the doubling: the occupied line considerably more was advanced respective and the units, when not engaged by the Greeks, were all used to improve slowly and painfully the emplacements; moreover, both the *Julia* is and the *Pusteria* had one single handicraftsmen company, even the busiest in competition with the units and for the systemizing of the muleteer. After all, to be able to give hand to prescribed how much it was for the divisions a problem

33) It was calculated to decide, reaching to the exuberant personnel regarding the service of the guns) of approximately 40 men per gun, to employ holding present that was necessary one square of six men for every part of the gun; that speed was possible to hold one of approximately 300 meters hour on mule; and that every man could carry the cargo for two minutes maximum (f. 66/op. dated 7.12.1940 of the Command *Julia* artillery).



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

with a very difficult solution. Another letter of the *Julia* still played alarm. It was a matter of unit on whose behavior could not subsist a shadow of doubt; the coming from notes of pessimism from it did not concur indifference or skepticism. Made a picture of last the ten days, Gen. Girotti wrote:

"(...) Living in means to the units the true and real feeling is had that all influences by now on the physical faculties, psychical and mental of all; the alpine heart can still resist, but it can have from a moment to the other a financial ruin and is this that consider must the commander make present. Of it is convenient to introduce at once, in this state of things, the atmosphere of the line, the complements for topic that this latent depression can have its repercussion on some put fresh element to contact with troops in such conditions "⁽³⁴⁾.

In any case the *Julia* was in order to make use of a moment of relative truce, because the Greek II Corps had begun the preparation of the offensive for Klisura. In this period, but, to a beautiful news followed a heavier disillusion than an nth Greek attack. They were in arrival three battalions complements (and fourth that had to follow): two for the 9° alpine with approximately 500 men each, and one for the 8th with 700 men. All with only the individual armament. Then, just arrived (18 Decembers), the Bn. of the 8th remained at Berat at the disposition of the C.A. and the two of the 9th, therefore was, immediately diverted to the *Bari*. The thunderstorm, in fact, was being pulled down on it.

The *Bari* division on 5 December had assumed the responsibility of the Vojussa field with: the I and VII/1st bersaglieres (Lt. Col. De Martino) on the southern slopes of the Qarishta and Fratarit; the 41st infantry *Modena* (Col. De Renzi) on the right of the river; the II and III/140th infantry *Bari* (Col. Carlà) on the left of the Vojussa until to Shës i Mal, top to the extreme north of the Dhembel; 68th cc.nn. Bn. and Bn. light tanks with one company bersaglieres motorcyclists in reserve (sketch n. 66).

The defense was organized in pockets of resistance to level of platoon or also of company, if of very reduced effectives. The problems that were placed to Gen. D'Havet they were three: to block the direction of the Vojussa, what of for if not excessively difficult if the units had been in the fullness of their efficiency, but that it became arduous with battalions seriously tried under every aspect - in first

34) DS D. Commando alp. *Julia*, f. 914/op. dated 12.12.1940.

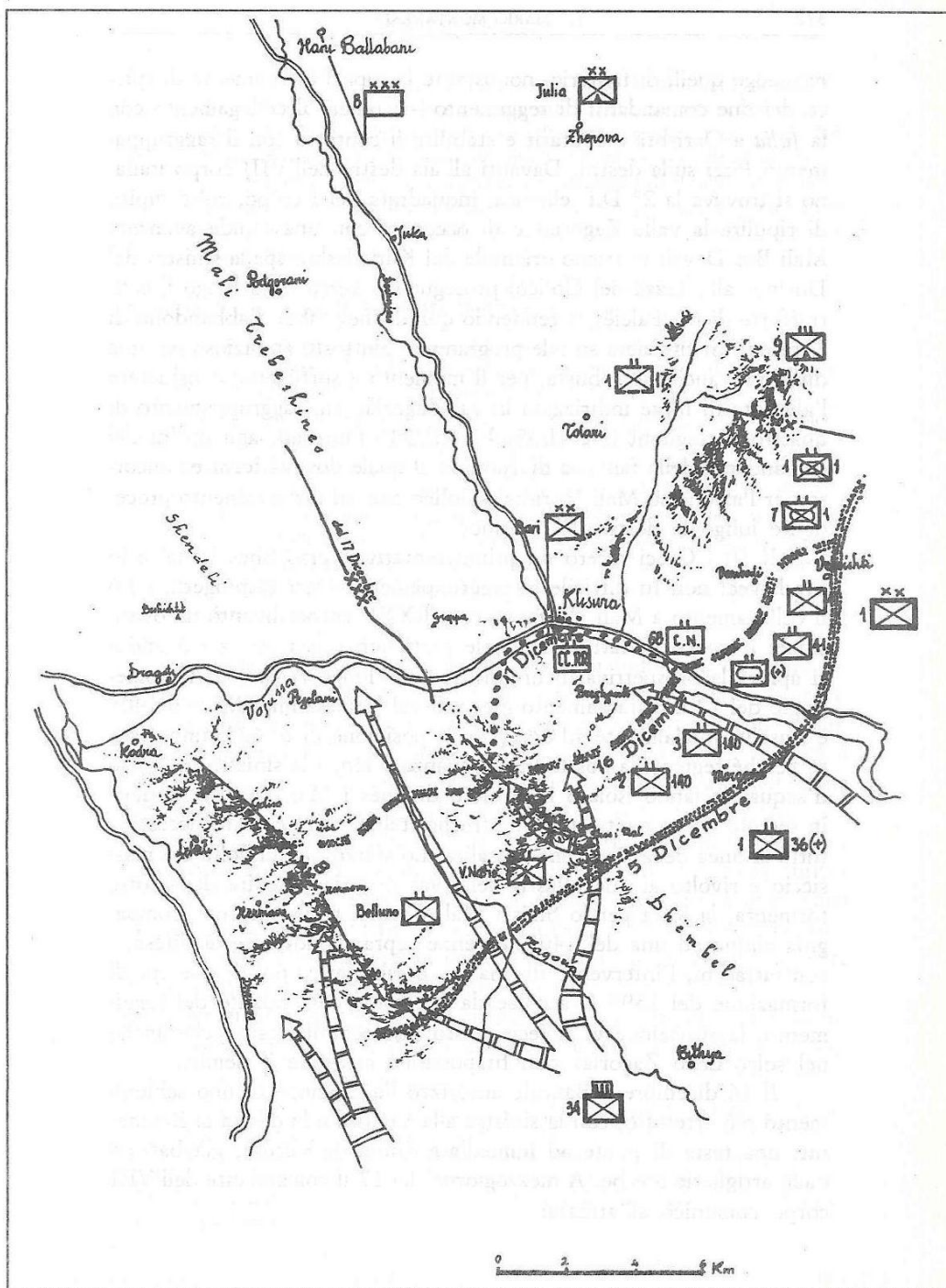
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 371

The Vojussa and Zagorias sector (5-20 December)

Schizzo n. 66

I SETTORI DELLA VOJUSSA E DELLO ZAGORIAS (5-20 DICEMBRE)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

place infantry those, in spite of the ability truly to I enunciate of the two commanders of regiment -; to hold the connection with the *Julia* to Qarishta and Fratarit and to establish the contact with the *Pizzi* grouping on the right. In front of the right wing of the Italian VIII Corps the Greek 2nd Inf. Div. was found, framed in the Coprs, with the task to clean up the Zagorias valley and to occupy with a fast advance one Mali Bus Devrit (extreme east of the Kurvelesh and left flank of the Dhrinos to the height of the Golico) continuing towards the north along the buttress of M. Palcies, and rendering therefore the abandonment of Tepeleni unavoidable. We will return on such program, even if sturdy, rather ambitious for one Division; for the moment it is sufficient to consider the share of forces addressed in the Zagorias valley: a grouping of four battalions (I and II/3rd, I and III/34th infantry), under the orders of the commander of the divisional infantry, which he had to supply cooperation for the action on Mali Hormova -Golico with a proceeding detachment along the right of the Dhrinos.

On the 10th the Greeks made a first attempt towards Shës i Mal and the Strakavec; was not difficult for the *Pizzi* grouping to reject them, but the connection to Mali Hormova with the XXV Corps became an obsession: the units sent from both sides did not succeed to find themselves and the perspective of a long infiltration was opened the chain. The afternoon of the 12th the Greek detachment of Vojussa valley engaged the 140th and it initially succeeded to occupy the position of hill 623, important because it marked the possibility to advance along the left of the water course leaving isolated the garrison of Shës i Mal, but it later on lost it to an Italian nocturnal counterattack. The next morning all the line of the *Bari* was attacked. The effort this time massive and was turned to the two pillars of the Zagorias valley . Sharpened from the strong torments, the fight for the Shës i Mal, where alpine company and one of the 140th were found, becoming bitter; in spite of the defense, the counterattacks, the participation of one cpy. carabinieri and then of two cyp. of the 139th Inf. formation. it noticed from Berat with the commander of the regiment, the situation was made you soon indefensible, very much since also in the furrow of the Zagorias was not possible to arrest the enemy.

On 16 December Gen. Bancale authorized the assumption, of a more rear alignment, with left on the Vojussa and the right on the Brezhanit: one bridgehead to immediate defense of Krsura, already struck from the Greek artilleries. At noon of the 17th the commander of the VIII Corps communicated to the army:

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"I have examined in position with the General D'Havet the dire Vojussa situation. On the positions already indicated is fought fiercely but the forces are shrinking. The general does not guarantee to be able to maintain said positions. Klisura is under the fire of the opposing artillery. Some hit houses are in flames. Line of the strong points nearly defenseless for lack of troops. I have ordered General D'Havet to resist at all cost on the positions and to collect themselves men found wherever in the rear & take them to the strong points astride the roadway. Situation critical (...)"⁽³⁵⁾.

and after three hours he supplied further worse news:

"The situation on the left of Vojussa aggravated. General D'Havet communicates that the units are flowing from the footbridge and they set off to garrison the strong points. The 140th infantry reduced to 160 men, cc.nn. and CC.RR. in total 150 men. No news of the units of the 139th with Colonel Gino and a platoon of engineers is had. Given situation 41st infantry right of Vojussa I have given order to General D'Havet that for now maintains detention. In the eventuality but that it came to find itself too much exposed to the opposing fire the right flank of the 41st, the directive it is to hold firm on Varibodi and to connect the defense to the strong points. General D'Havet will make to destroy footbridge after himself insured that none of our unit still finds itself on that side of the Vojussa. This must constitute insurmountable obstacle to the enemy movement. From today the radio communications are interrupted with Colonel Pizzi"⁽³⁶⁾.

In such circumstances Gen. Geloso was induced to divert to the VIII Corps two battalions of complements of the 9th alpine - armed, to repeat, only with individual armament - assigns a to strengthen the line of strong points and to act as local reserve, let alone the I/17th infantry *Acqui* just disembarked, that came located in the zone of Tolari for being in a position to counterattack in case the enemy was successful to break through the front to south of Qarishta and Fratarit or to reinforce those close sectors ⁽³⁷⁾. Moreover, inasmuch as the *Pizzi* grouping was withdrawn until to the Golico-Brezhanit and that by now no tactical communication existed between it and the *Bari*, the army determined to pass it to the dependencies of the XXV Corps, moving the limit between the two bodies on the crest of the Trebeshines.

For some day the things remained stationary, revived from activity of patrols and shooting of artillery and mortars. Only to the north,

35) DS Commander VIII Army Corps, tele 1/1151 op. dated 17.12.1940, hours 12,15.

36) Ibid, 1/1151 tele dated 17.12.1940, hours 15.

37) At midnight of the 20th Gen. Geloso telephoned Gen. Bancalè foreshadowing the immediate arrival of the *Borgo S. Dalmazzo* alp. Bn. trucked, about the day after made he to say that the Bn. had been destined to other sector (Litorale), where the situation was still worse than on the Vojussa.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

in the area of the Osum, the fight had been rekindled. The *Feltre* the 20th had gotten hold of the northern spur of the Gostanghes, holding hard for two days until, threatened with encirclement, was forced to carry itself to the West of Q. Devris. In indicating just in that zone the more delicate point of the *Pusteria*, Gen. De Cia was stopped on two particularly serious deficiencies in the area of the transmissions and the transports:

"(...) as known the area entrusted to me exceeds 30 km, and the means of my own regiments are insufficient to establish a efficient net of connections (...). As already put in evidence they are approximately 45 km of horrible and muddy mule tracks that separate Berati from the nucleus stretchers of the 7th section, health, from the divisional P.A.M. and from the most advanced rations depot. In order to exceed this distance they have been instituted four places of stage and have been divided between them the mules available. In total draft to re-supply itself in the Osum valley approximately 5,000 men, therefore for the provisions only 130 quadrupeds to every place of stage are necessary. For ammunitions it has been impossible to up here carry the entire equipment of the units; the batteries only decide of 150 rounds per piece, rather than 250. The 250 mules approximately of which it is arranged are sufficient for the transport of part of the portion provisions (...) but the impossibility remains to transport fodder for the quadrupeds of the line pieces and to supply to the every day supply of ammunitions both of the artillery and of the infantry. As above I think it must be look at since the effective situation of the dependent units is known in the cares of the resistance possibilities (...)" (38).

In short, Gen. Bancale from every part received disheartening news: the *Pusteria* considered its own left on the verge of collapse - the connection with the 9th Army - and badly was kept the contact with the *Julia*; the *Bari* were reduced to Klisura; the *Julia* remained on the salient of the Qarishta to Fratarit, now too much pronounced. And from all of them arrived signaling about movements of Greek troops, forerunners of an imminent resumption of the offensive.

4. The OPERATIONS BETWEEN THE STRAKAVEC AND THE SEA (11th ARMY)

The movement with the forces of the Greek II Corps in the area between Osum and Vojussa had influenced on the organization of command in action Up to now the army corps had to act framed in the SAMO, but the new tactical address rendered a coming from logistic support from bases situated in Epiro and, consequently, from necessary 30 November

(38) DS D. Commander alp. *Pusteria*, f. 107/op. dated 21.12.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

it passed to the direct orders of the Supreme Command, to the same level with the I Corps. The guidance of two independent major unit, both interested to a offensive action on the Gianina- Valona direction, induced naturally to another provision: the constitution of a command in a position to coordinating their nearby employment and with sure vision of the possibilities and the necessities. In place of a new Commander of army, or Section of army, was preferred to use a *advanced Group of the Supreme Command* with headquarters in Gianina (17 Decembers). While the II Corp tried to open a passage in furrows of the Osum and the Vojussa, the units in the front formation operated to the left extreme of the Greek disposition with all: the 2nd I.D. to right; the 8th I.D. to the center, large way on the director of Kalibaki- Tepeleni; the 3rd on the left; still more on the left, on the coast, the Liuba battle-group, equivalent to a brigade, had exceeded good the border line but perceiving the weight of the supported fight. The 2nd I.D. was enfilade with *many* forces on the left of the Vojussa and in the valley of Suhes and, articulated in detachments of varied entity, it tried to go around the defense of Kakavia, that for ten days they held nailed the 8th I.D.. This was tired out. Received at 20:00 of 2 December the telephone order to proceed against Bureto and the saddleback of Radati in order to occupy them before dawn and to continue soon after on Episkopi, to reach in the successive day, its commander answered:

"Nocturnal operation against Bureto and of the equal operation against q. 669 [Radati saddleback] to complete before dawn being most difficult but not impossible if cause nature ground, abundant snow and situation. Units of the division are a very exhausted numerically and physically cause continuous combats for 40 days, being all the line of units of the division always in the first row. Attack will continue to dawn "(39).

After which asked a rest of ten days with a relation that evidenced the state of the division. In with tempo but he prepared the attack tidy. But only the evening of the 4th, when the *Ferrara* began the withdraw, was possible to reach the ridge that from the Bureto it comes down towards Episkopi and at the dark of the 5th to put foot on the very contrasted Radati saddleback. By now the valley of the Dhrinos was open. The effort had been hardest: the Italian resistance, that until to Hani Delvinaki – according to the Greek appreciation - had not been very deciding, had become stiff in proximity of the border and especially to the Radati saddleback

(39) Greek S.M.E., op. cit., vol. 111, page 133.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

"where the infantry, although decimated, continued to battle with fury" ⁽⁴⁰⁾. On the 7th the division passed into reserve, collecting itself astride the border and only keeping the 15th infantry, the III/40th and the III/42nd; the remaining units passed to the other divisions of the army corps.

Between 5 and 8 December the advance of the 2nd division in the Dhrinos valley was cautious and without history, simply hindered by the climatic conditions that were getting worse and the continuous rain and was changed into a most violent snow storm. The supplying was made problematic and insufficient; as it happened for the Italian units, also the Greek regiments were lacking in shoes, of wool garments, warm provisions.

The 3rd I.D. had a task initially easier since was found to south of Kakaviat that is move in practical in a space in which it was faced from the wings of the *Ferrara* and the *Siena*, also however the progression was not quick, in part for the opposite resistance from the Italian rearguard (41), in part for the rearrangement of the dispositions ordered from the army corps: the 4th I.D. had to replace the 8th on the positions reached and to insert between the 2nd and the 3rd, which, in order to allow such insertion, had to be moved to the west of Delvino and to assume the responsibility of the coastal area in place of the Liuba detachment, that had exceeded Bistrica. It is not that, because of delay and hitch, instead happening between 6 and 7 December the operation was delayed to the next night.

As it was taken place in the Italian units, the conditions in which the units were struck and lived from little mobilized could not influence negatively on the execution of the orders and sure in the determined movements for the three interested divisions were unavoidable the

(40) Greek S.M.E. op. cit., vol. III, page 139.

(41) According to the Greek narration, on the long relief of Plativuni (Olatevum) the fight was very bitter one being well adorned and "*positions supported by a battalion of the Immortali and by a mortar battalion, in which, according to some information, the son of Mussolini found himself also that remained hurt in this combat*" (S.M.E. Greek, op. cit., vol. III, page 135). It is ignored on the base of which elements has been thought reliable the existence of a similar units. It is strange item the news of the presence of one of the sons of Mussolini - well-known both recalled to the Aeronautics - in a Mortar bdg.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

misfortunes ⁽⁴²⁾, much more than the lengthening of the supply routes and evacuation were provoking serious lacks of balance in the operation of the essential services.

The 4th Inf. Div., concentrated 19 November to the east of Metsovo, slowly had been approaching the Epirus front arriving on 6 December in the zone of Valtsista – Kastaniani - Kerasovo, to the shelter of the border, with its three regiments. The substitution of the 8th Inf. Div. happened, and without solution of continuity, it had the task to proceed along the axis of the Mali Gjer. Also was a matter itself clearly of an advance without expectable resistance, the operation was disposed on wide front but with precaution: a tending semicircle to cover the left flank, to reach the northern slopes of the Mali Gjer and to come down the valley of the Dhrinos to north of Argirocastro, consolidating the occupation of this last one. The morning of the 8th the action had beginning, even if finding a single obstacle in the cold, the snow and the deficiency of muleteer. On the right, in Dhrinos valley, the move to preserve a antitank tactical complex constituted *ad hoc*, that, received news towards noon of the successful evacuation of Argirocastro from the Italian side (night of the 7th) entered in the city received with great enthusiasm from pro-Greek elements ⁽⁴³⁾.

On 9 December the Greek I Corps circulated the orders for the attack to the Italian defensive position: on the left of the 3rd Inf. Div. to which was assigned to

42) It is worth the pain to bring back the report forwarded from the commander of 40th infantry (4th Inf. Div.), which it took part of initiative in order to try to resolve the created situation for the absence in place of the personal person in charge of the control of the movements: "(...) Such movement during the night from the 7 to 8 December under the rain was a true martyrdom, since the movement had not been organized in is made successive for the units that had to move on the same route. And so themselves miserable in march in the same night the 40^o regiment (II/40th and I/42nd), like pure units of the 4th Inf. Div. that had to replace those of the 3rd Inf. Div., is worth to say or the infantry, a group of artillery on three batteries and the group of recognition. In the ravine of Muzine a hoard without previous was taken place and if enemy aviation had introduced the day after decidedly for the regiments that would have become the ravine of death. It was not present some officer of the General Staff. For reasons of seniority and in absence of advanced in degree, I assumed the task to create a little order. The indignation was general because of the sleep insufficiency, of the eternal to move itself, the rain, the cold and the hard work. From the 18:30 of 7 December the incessant rain and the wind made to chill every thing and every man. The draft animals' maxims for exhaustion rendered the night path unfit for use, a path that however would have had more opportunely to call a stone scale (...)" . Greek S.M.E., op. cit., vol. III, pag. 141.

43) Also a *Te Deum* was celebrated to which taken it leave the Metropolitana di Gianina, Spiridione Vlahos, purposely rushed in order to emphasize the *reconquest*. It in fact had been member of the so-called temporary northern Epirus Government of the proclamation from Zografos in 1913.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the objective of the Mali Corajt; to the center the 4th Inf. Div. which it was destined the Mali That; to the right the 2nd Inf. Div. that had to reach Bus Devrit and the Golico. It was be a matter more rather of a frontal offensive to fan, with all the forces in the first lines the 8th Inf. Div. and the Liuba grouping, more than in the second formation they had to be considered in reserve, burdening on they the tie of employment from part of the Supreme Command -, without a center of gravitation of the attack, without the search of one maneuvered solution. Probably happening on any drawn of minor resistance was thought sufficient tactical in order to after all provoke a chain reaction of yielding, translate itself in a further general withdraw, if not quite in the breach of the line. To add that the two wings – 2nd and 3rd division - had both a serious reason of operating dispersion in the respective field: the 3rd necessarily were attracted towards the north-west from the coastal director and from the entrance of the Kuci valley; the 2nd from Zagorias valley. Both, then, were found to a natural obstacle of important intrinsic robustness: the full of rocks bar of the Mali Corajt -Mali and Qeparoit, to whose feet slid the torrent of Borshi, and the group of the Golico. The contact was established on 11 December.

The Italian XXV Corps had deployed on two divisional sectors (sketch n. 67). The *Ferrara*, astride of the Dhrinos, had the 48th infantry with two battalions to east of the river and the 47th with three lean battalions nominal to the West, and the 166th cc.nn. Bn. in reserve.

The *Modena*, on the Kurvelesh, introduced a linear device: the 3rd grenadiers (with two battalions) from Bus Devrit to Mali Shpat; the 42nd infantry (three battalions) until to Mali That; the *Bolzano* battalion isolated to the extreme right and the 36th cc.nn. Bn in reserve. The reserve of army corps was constituted from the *Centauro* (less the units called to make part of the reserve of the Army at Fieri), collection to the west of Tepeleni, and from the 2nd bersaglieres at Dragoti. The losses had been most sensitive, especially for the *Ferrara*, than from 28 October it had lost among dead, hurt and missing to 127 officials and 3,420 non-commissioned officers and soldiers, but all the added announced arrival from Italy of four organic battalions induced to consider the immediate future not unfavorably.

For how much the withdraw of the bulk had not been disturbed, the organization of the resistance position met difficulty: The work just sketched in some point; some features of reticulated to simple triangular hedge through the valley of the Dhrinos, but was

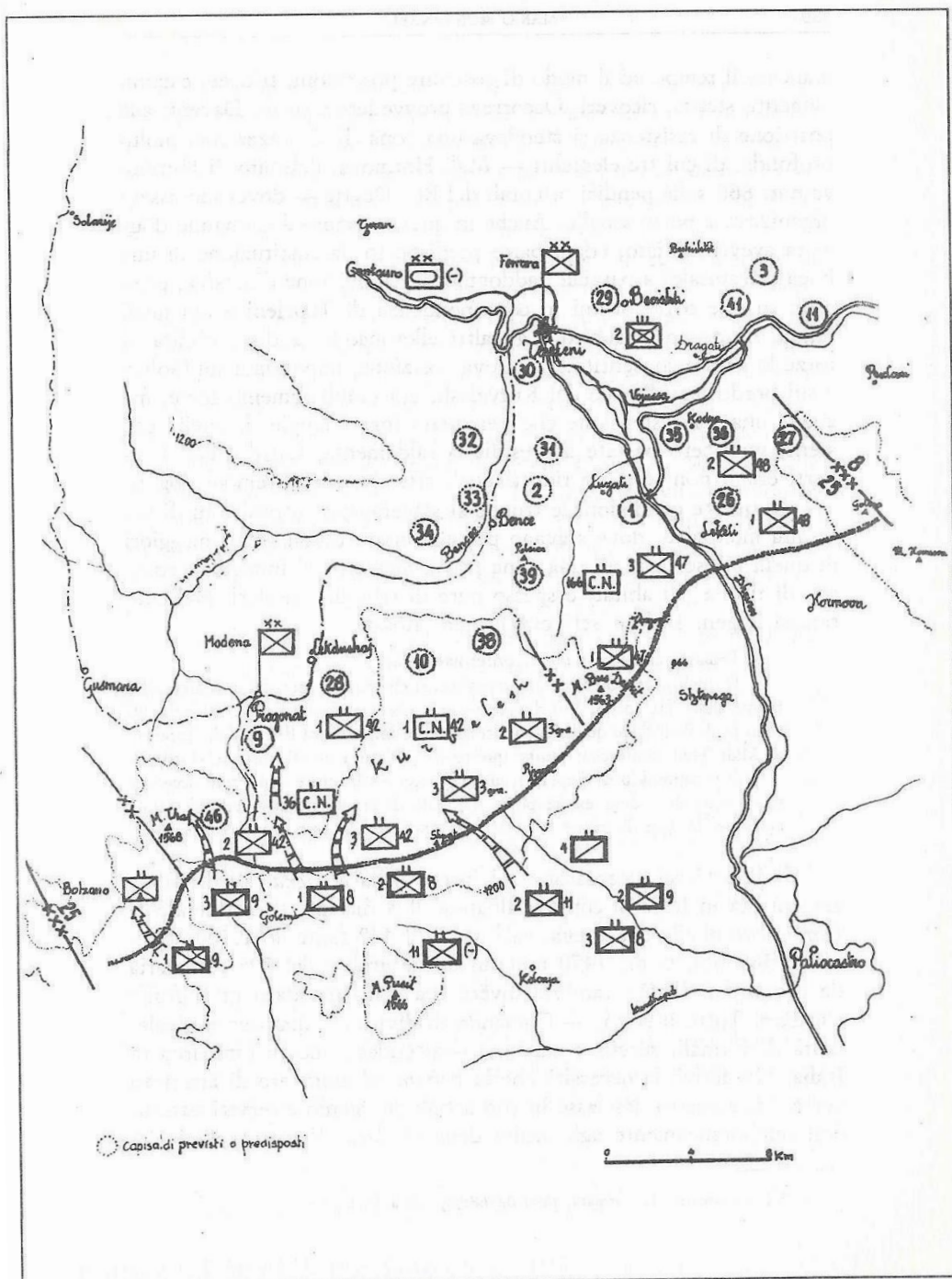
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 379

The alignment with the XXV army corps (10-15 December)

Schizzo n. 67

LO SCHIERAMENTO DEL XXV CORPO D'ARMATA (10-15 DICEMBRE)



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

lacking the time and the way to construct emplacements, trenches, communication trenches, roads, shelters. It was necessary to supply to all. In front of the resistance position was spread safety zone not very - deep, of which three elements - Mali Hormova, the town of Hormova and hill 866 on the eastern slopes of the Bus Devrit - they had to be organized to place stumbling blocks. Also in this sector the Commander of the Army had studied, and in part predisposed, the constitution of a line of strong points to partial doubling of the defensive position, strong points on two or three orders in correspondence of Tepeleni and which some to occupy at once and the others when the availability of forces had concurred it. The new position, hinged on the Golico and the southern edge of the Kurvelesh, was undoubtedly strong, but it had a such extension that double forces of those existing would not have been enough to garrison it securely. Beyond to that, the units were not only reduced in the effectives but extremely worn out.

In these conditions the troops deployed on positions of true high mountain, where they were in order to face still greater uneasiness of those already suffered, in a zone lacking, also in the immediate rear, of resources, of often to live and also of simple farmhouses. At the same time Gen. Geloso wrote to gen. Rossi:

I hold to specify and to confirm that:

1) what can be the events that were in order to determine themselves on the front of the VIII Corps, You must tenaciously hold your C.A. on put into effect the positions, of which have particularly importance the feature from Tepeleni to comprised the Mali That, welding point this with the sector of the Litorale;

2) the strong point of T epeleni, to which it is necessary to work with accelerated and intensive rhythm, must be placed in a position to making front to eventual enemy actions from every direction and to resist even if had to remain isolated"⁽⁴⁴⁾.

On the 12th the Greeks attacked on the front of the *Modena*. The division had entered online to the Albanian border on 3 December having replaced the *Ferrara* with what it had, is worth to say the 42nd infantry (1,500 men), the 36th cc.nn. Bn. (450 men) and two the 290th groups of field artillery. The 41st infantry instead had been sent in reinforces to the *Bari*. All the rest, - Commander of division, general barracks, divisional units, services and baggage train - still awaited boarding in Italy. The necessity derived some that the *Ferrara*, at the moment to withdraw towards Argirocastro, temporary left in situated artillery, engineers and services passing them the orders of the *Modena*. Was put to

44) DS Command 11th Army, fono 027689/op. dated 10.1.2.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the dependencies of these last also the II/3rd grenadiers with the regimental units (850 men) and the *Bolzano* battalion (220 men). In total approximately 3,000 infantrymen. To carried out the withdraw (6 Decembers), the *Modena* assumed the responsibility of the sector from Mali That to Bus Devrit, with approximately a third party of the forces - increase by the III/3rd grenadiers and the 82° cc.nn Bn.. - in reserve.

On the paper, therefore, acceptable situation. In truth the inflow of the units was happening slowly leaving behind most numerous personnel, and the same service of collection and starting of the latecomers immediately decided constituted not simple problem, in how much the sector was unprovided of paths, the difficultly recognizable tracks and the arduous guideline, especially for the fog and the high snow beyond a meter. Already it has been said that divisional the logistic order was entire from creating, but before every other thing it was necessary to constitute at Progonat shuttlecock of provisions, ammunitions and forage and to improve the route of supply and evacuation represented from a poor mule track that give to Bridge of Bence (the west of Tepeleni) skirting the Bences torrent and then it climbed on the Kurvelesh touching Lekdushaj, Progonat and Golemi: *not less* than sixteen hours of march!

Neither was sure an easy distance because in the feature from Bence to Progonat the steep wall from a part and the precipice from the other did not allow the passage of mules with lateral cargo, so much that the first night fifteen quadrupeds fell in the valley; on the other hand, for disciplining to the transit instituting the only sense it had to use the path, the much longest one, than Gusmara and Salarije. The issue of the baggage train, moreover, was worrisome for the state of exhaustion of the mules, not provisioned for various days, and for their absolute quantitative insufficiency. In twenty four hours of intense work the state of the muleteer improved, but after a week it was only possible to implant two cableways of the capacity of 10 q. per hour, that they concurred an sensitive lightening in the transport of the material, at least until Lekdushaj. As far as the action of command: *"I'm up here - communicated Col. Sciavo - I do not decide that of a captain for the 41st infantry. I cannot embezzle officers bonds to the units, that they have already deficient organization and necessity of officers whom they know to react against the depressing influence of the time and the uneasiness (...)"* ⁽⁴⁵⁾. And in truth

45) DS Commando *Modena* Inf. Div., f. 47/A dated 9.12.1940, hours 22:00. From the Commander of division it was reached the single section operations. Col. Sclavo, head of S.M. of the *Modena*, had assumed the interm command when the Gen. Gloria was hurt.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

the remarkable distances, that they rendered the connection to means of couriers slow and laborious, and the sparsely and qualitative mediocrity of radio means recorded negatively in the relationships with the battalions. Finally the alignment, not been able to recognize previously, had to be controlled and to be corrected on the place, such that the making of contact with the *Ferrara* at Bus Devrit had not been realized and on the Pizarit the resistance line, rather than to run on the margin of the plateau, had been developed somewhat more behind leaving the enemy - by now close with its patrols - the edge of the plateau without the more possibility than opportune modifications. The evening of the 11th the division commander, after to have recognized that sector, communicated to General Rossi:

"(...) the sector of the grenadiers is not efficient: the resistance line will have a development of approximately eight kilometers: of front to it *all* the land is practicable. The III Bn. currently has a force of 250 men that loses weight every day for diseases and cold (...). the occupation of the resistance line is made by a nuclei much to strongly spaced out; I have not found support. I have ordered them to constitute. So at the disposition of the commander of the sector is the 82nd cc.nn. Bn. (350 men -7 machineguns. -3 x 45mm mortars), for a ready employment of which in the immense surface of the sector some difficulty is introduced.

Moreover the state of exhaustion and discouragement of the units is such that their efficiency is in truth much reduced. The living conditions of the units on the line, given the state of their equipment, the irregularity of the service supplying provisions, the total lack of firewood, the sparsely of burlaps for shelters is truly very hard. I ask the Excellence of wanting to consider the possibility and the measure of reinforcing of troops" ⁽⁴⁶⁾.

Something was flowing: the engineer company, one company telegraphers, one company 81 mm mortars, two worker companies, the battery of accompaniment of the Lancers of *Aosta*. But the enemy had arrived also.

At 09:45 of 12 December the Greek I and III/9th, approached under cover of the fog and the sleet, they attacked the feature defended by the II/42nd Infantry, which, under strong pressure, yielded concurring an sensitive infiltration that stretched to the head of the valley of Progonat. Only the repeated participation first of the 36th cc.nn. Bn. and the divisional reserve (I/42nd) then succeeded to re-establish the *status quo*. To part the adaptation of the defense rendered necessary from the changed combative ability to the battalions, the situation was being made leaden: the cold

46) DS Commander *Modena* Inf. Div., f. 67/A dated 11.12.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

intense and the nocturnal storm, the losses of the 42nd - all the four commanders of company of the II Bn. had fallen on the positions - rendered still more heavy of the numerous ones frost bite and from frozen to death⁽⁴⁷⁾; the uncertainties emerged in the sector of the left: all this was not easy to face with serenity and confidence. Of it a lot was worth the increase of the sector contiguous to the *Siena* division until to Mali That, where collected the *Bolzano*. In the first afternoon hours of the 13th, the Greeks renewed the attempt to the saddleback of Golemi and this time the collision invested all the right side of the *Modena*: The Greek 9th infantry against the Mali That, the 8th against the Mali Shpat, supported by the 11th infantry. The I/42nd, that had replaced the II battalion, it was swept up in a few hours and the counterattacks of reconstituted the divisional reservoir were bloody but ineffective. Instead the III/42nd held hard on the Mali Shpat although following the enemy efforts. To evening, although the arrival XIV and XXIV/5th bersaglieres at Lekdushaj had allowed to re-establish in some way the meshes of the defense, the units were very shaken. All the commanders of battalion of the regiment had fallen. The soldiers hit by freezing of 1° degree did not come cleared in order demolish the line. If of extreme gravity, the state of the things was not however serious because of the loss of the saddleback of Golemi and was aggravated remarkably in the morning of the 15th, later after a penetration towards Progonat contained with difficulty and rejected only thanks to the arrival of one Bn. complements of the 47th Infantry, diverted on the plateau of the Kurvelesh as soon as introduced to Tepeleni. In the afternoon, in the view of the Gen. Trionfi, new commander of the *Modena*, offered a discouraging picture. But the greater contrast to exceed was not the Greeks. It was something that tie up and it also made them to suffer, much to force them to at least interrupt the action for a pair of days:

"After to have lend service for all my life, from 1912 today comprised the campaign of Russia, as officer - the commander of the Greek 4th Inf. Div. under the Command of the I Corps wrote - creed of being able to assert that our army has not ever supported a similar test, obliged to move with absolutely unsuitable nor efficient footwear and to fight in full December at an altitude varying between the 730 and 1700 meters and you deprived of clothing of wool and in particular of stockings (...). Found the folding of soldiers of I and the II/8th towards Golemi because of the indefensible cold (...)"⁽⁴⁸⁾,

47) the assessment of the losses were rendered difficult, at least at first, for the fluctuation of the units on the line and the deficiency of the connections, let alone for the fact that many fallen came nearly immediately buried by the snow.

48) Greek S.M.E., op, cit, vol. III, pag. 171.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

To the *Modena* it was reached also the II/2nd bersaglieres; but once again a superficial surveying seems useful to exemplify the errors of appraisal to which on the force ratios can lead. The comparison to level of major unit supplies a relationship of 1: 1 is worth to say the Greek 4th Inf. Div. against the *Modena*. If reported by regiments it is still to 1:1, three Greeks against three Italians (42nd infantry, 3rd grenadiers and 5th bersaglieres). Where the battalions consider themselves the varied relationship to Italian advantage: the 9 Bns. Greek against the Italians, comprising also II/2nd bersaglieres. Translate but in concrete figures the consistency of the battalions the things change radically: II/2nd bers., par to three hundred men; XIV/5th bers., ninety men; XXIV/5th bers. one hundred fifty; I/42nd infantry, disappeared; II and III/42nd reduced each to 100-200 men *presumed*; *Bolzano* Bn., one group of forty of alpine; II and III/3rd grenadiers presumably on the three hundred total men; the 82nd cc.nn. Bn., one hundred; the 166th cc.nn. Bn, one hundred fifty. In total, therefore, the *Modena* division by now struck with 1,400-1,500 combatants less the officers. Supposing from Greek part - in lack of precise data - a medium level *at least* 500 men per battalion, rather cautious appraisal, a total of 4,500 men is obtained, that is a relationship of 3: 1 to favor of the later. The classic relationship in order to have reason of a defended secure arranged defense.

On 16 December at 10:00 the *Bolzano* Bn., lacking in ammunitions and provisions communicated:

"Ours Radio does not work in the snowstorm, that it still continues has reduced least the alpine remained and also the officers in such conditions from minimally not being able to react. Ten alpine cannot move for freezing of lower limbs, as many freezing to the upper limbs try to reach Progonat. Our permanence in position is useless. If these conditions persist, I preview that this evening also last the ten remaining soldiers and the included officers will be in the conditions, not to be able itself to move. We are remained up to now in these conditions exclusively by name call made by the Mother land and the honor of our Army, but we see that the sacrifice is useless ",

and at 16:50:

"It torments violent & the highest snow prevents to movements *stop* sinks beyond waist *stop* many freezing".

The storm and the rigid cold acted cruelly also on the supply: the mules do not shoed to ice slipped along the frosted mule trail, for more interrupted from landslides and snow drifts. Many automatic arms

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

were jammed for lack of anti-freeze oil. Of a patrol of 35 bearers of rations and ammunitions sent to the *Bolzano*, only the officer in command and ten men succeeded to reach on the Mali That, the other twenty-five, worn-out from fatigue, were remained along the road. On the evening of the 17th the general situation was unchanged, even if began infiltrations of Greek patrols in the wide uncontrolled and uncontrollable intervals, because of the loss of every lateral connection from part of lean the units on the line. As far as the 3rd grenadiers, the news transmitted from the regiment commander was analogous to those coming from the rest of the sector: *"The force online cannot be specified because my data lack the battalions, but creed they do not exceed 350 men diluted on themselves a front of six kilometers approximately"*. In short, the more and more numerous infiltrations, the penetration reached a few hundreds of meters from Progonat, the isolation of the single units induced Gen. Trionfi to ask the Commander of army corps for being able to withdraw on Gusmara and Lekdushaj *"because the situation by now is irremediably compromised and remaining in place all would be lost"*⁽⁴⁹⁾ and soon after taking of initiative the painful decision:

Enemy overwhelmed our defense sector front 42nd infantry aims in direction Bencia valley & Gusmara *stop* tidy retreat at the line of the strong points 28-10 & at height to south Gusmara *stop* will try to transfer Command to Lekdushaj"⁽⁵⁰⁾.

The proposed regression objective was justified - wanting to save the rests of the division - because over ran the right the withdraw became undelyable. On the other hand the decision was serious much for the danger that was created within the XXV Corps, and consequently of the army. Not only, but - the defense of the same sectors came to separate in two stumps without connection between them and by reaching the new line did not allow even a sure contact with the *Ferrara*, so much that the Greek formations wedge between the two divisions succeeding even to intercept the line of communications of the *Modena* (the Bences valley), for which - the supply columns endured ambushes and attacks. Considering the impending threat on Tepeleni, the resolution to withdraw was very badly received from the XXV

49) DS Commander *Modena* Inf. Div., tele 198/A dated 18.12.1940, hours 17:30.

50) Ibid, tele 200/A dated 18.12.1940, hours 18:30.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Corp, which to previous a dramatic phonogram⁽⁵¹⁾ had already answered announcing the arrival of the 18th infantry *Acqui* with two battalions, of which already in way on the mule track of Salarije with the task to reach and to occupy Gusmara the next day, while the other, awaited the night, would have been started the following morning directed for Bence on strongholds 28 and 10. "*It is necessary to resist in order to give time to arrive stop I assure you*", had concluded Gen. Rossi⁽⁵²⁾. Inevitable, therefore, the hardest message of disapproval with the prohibition to withdraw the rest of the *Bolzano*, isolated on the Mali That:

"I forbid withdrawing the alpine from Mali That *stop* battalion already sent to reinforce Gusmara *stop* Not a rushed situation where commanders be able to obey to the orders that is to resist or to die *stop* I deplore inconsiderate and prejudicial withdrawing therefore the general situation especially for abandonment all artillery & the Progonat stronghold" ⁽⁵³⁾.

The XXV Corps Commander tried to make up for damage to the crisis constituting an independent area in val Salarije with the troops of Gusmara, arranging one obstruction in val Bences to the height of the country of the same name, giving impulse to the work of strengthening of the interested strongpoint to the containment. He tried also to obtain from the Army Commander the 17th infantry *Acqui*, but it was destined to other strongly engaged areas. In any case, in the day of the 19th the line of the strong-points was occupied and highly summarily organized to the defense, from Lekdushaj at the ridge of Mali Palcies; at the same time the rests of the 82nd cc.nn. bdg. was sent to occupy the massive one to the north of Progonat, between branches of the Bences, in order to avoid of the undisturbed conquest from part of the Greeks who got themselves ready to move towards Gusmara, where had barricaded, block, the other block of the division. In the night on the 20th the two battalions of the 18th infantry finally arrived.

The events in the area of the Modena were carefully followed by the XXV Corp Commander, also for the repercussions on the front of the *Ferrara*. The Bus Devrit was considered the most important pillar, much to impose on it the *express and sure* contact between the 47th infantry and the 3rd grenadiers and to prescribe that, the arrival of the complements battalions, the 47th was oriented to send one on Kurvelesh "*for*

(51) Ibid, tele 184/A hours 17: "*Situation most serious stop we are already threatened with encirclement, performance underway*". The phonogram preceded of half hour the demand for authorization of withdraw (cited tele 198/A).

(52) DS Commander XXV Corps, tele 2483/op. dated 18.12.1940, hours 18.

(53) DS Commander XXV Corps, tele 2518/op. dated 19.12.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

the case that on the front of the 3rd grenadiers rgt. introduced beginning of an enemy attack". The realization lacked the tactical communication induced the *Ferrara* to order an occupation of the Bus Levrit wider, yes to cover the valley of Luzati and to make system with the position of Palcies Evils.

Undeniable they were advantages acquired by the enemy in this first phase of his offensive, for how much it pays the beloved price and slow in arrival. The Greek Corps, as a result of the directives received from the Supreme Command to continue the offensive with objective as Tepeleni and the access to the Sushica valley, had circulated 15 December own operations order whose lines sketch generally is therefore representable (n. 68):

- for the conquest of Tepeleni: the 4th Inf. Div. had to head energetically and quickly to Smokthina valley and Salarije, occupying the grip of Vermic for protection of the left and coming down in forces the Salarije valley until reaching the roadway Tepeleni- Valona. For its part the 2nd Inf. Div. had the task to engage the Italian troops in the valleys of the Dhrinos and the Zagorias, reaching, in case of favorable events, Vojussa in the zone of Tepeleni;

- for the opening of the Sushica valley: the 3rd Inf. Div. had to address with the main effort towards Kuci and secondary action on the coast in order to prevent movements of troops towards the north. In the second phase, by order of the Supreme Command, continuation of the advance until reaching respectively Gjormi and the Logora pass.

Subsequently it was previewed to proceed along the furrow of the Vojussa so as to ring, with the cooperation of the II Corps, the troops of Valona. In this operating conception the part assigned to the 2nd Inf. Div. therefore was substantially limited, except in two points correspondents to the wings of the *Ferrara*: the ridge of the Strakavec, from Mali Hormova to Colico, and the Bus Devrit. The left of the *Ferrara* was guaranteed from detachments of small entity located at Mali Hormova, in zone of safety, and on the Golico. Given the characteristics of the climate, they appeared adapted and in fact the Greek tried they obtained some temporary result but after all they did not succeed to assert themselves.

And however to place in prominence that the losses endured in such circumstances (18-19 December) the newly reduced 48th infantry a little thing: the III Bn. on the resistance position; II, and finally, Bn. subdivided between the strong point., hill 1615 of the Golico, Golico, Mali Hormova and

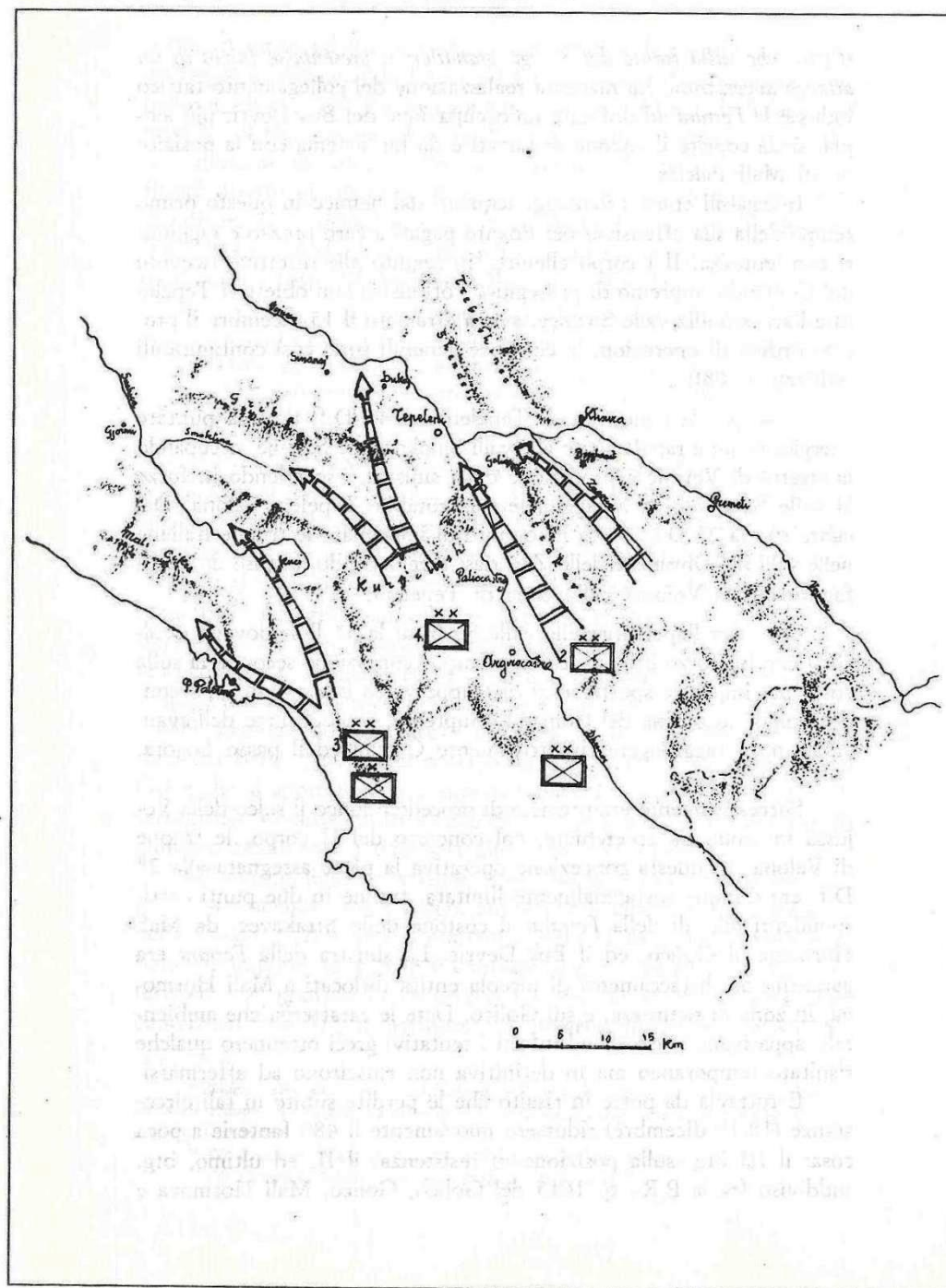
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 388

The operating design with the Greek army corps (15 Decembers)

Schizzo n. 68

IL DISEGNO OPERATIVO DEL I CORPO D'ARMATA GRECO (15 DICEMBRE)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

with one company at the disposition of 47th the infantry. In total the line was held by 1,300 men, of which several were not employable, like that those that came down from the Strakavec with symptoms more or less accentuate from freezing.

On the left of the Dhrinos, until to Bus Devrit, was deployed the 47th infantry. In particular Bus Devrit was held by a battalion complement, arrived soon the Tepeleni on the 13th and sent to relieve the III bdg. - or better, to its remains - for allowing them to collect more to the north, on the Mali Terzorit. The Greek attack (II/34th and III/36th I.) was delivered on the 15th. It had to be violent and quick and it was. "*The sideslip of the bdg. complements has happened in a single moment. It is itself pulverized as a snow ball launched against a rock cliff*", wrote in the report the commander of regiment⁽⁵⁴⁾, so that without warning the III/47th just rearward, found the enemy close. Ignited then a furious fight on q. 1381, to the road midway between Mali Terzorit and Bus Devrit, with all the determination that arrived from desperation. They were the arrival and the example of the colonel commander - than bring back the account of the difficult moment one had moved towards the Bus Devrit and, it meets you along the mule track about seventy skids, had stopped them, encouraged and led back to the fire - to giving breath after various courageous hours to the group and arresting the attack, that it had its apex the evening of the 15th, but continued until dark of the following day. Of the approximately two hundred fifty men of the III/47th f. two thirds they remained on the ground, dead or hurt. Also the attackers were hardly tried from the sourness of the crash and the climatic conditions. The new commander of the Greek detachment, arrived with two battalions of reinforcements (III/3rd and I mobile mtr. bdg.), reported to have found the units "*nearly in decline*"⁽⁵⁵⁾ and that great part of the automatic arms had been lost in the snow. Reordered, the Greeks resumed the attack on the 18th with the purpose to face from Bus Devrit the eventual Italian counterattack and to develop an action on the left carrying themselves on along buttress of the Mali Palcies and coming down it until showing oneself on the Tepeleni.

It was the moment, most delicate, in which the *Modena* signaled of being about to be encircled and the responsibility of the val Zagorias passed to the XXV Corps. But one short and unexpected pause

(54) 47th DS infantry, f. 2 prot., ris. dated 18.12.1940.

(55) Greek S.M.E., op, cit, vol. 111, page 176.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

adversary, due to fatigue, uncertainties or incompleteness of information on the situation created on the Kurvelesh, concurred the arrival of 18th infantry *Acqui*, the rearrangement of the *Modena* on the rear stronghold, where the work was carried out feverishly, and prevented the results hoped for by Gen. Kosmas, commander of the Greek Corps, came true; of that a lot these was hurt, formulating strict appreciations, much more than those was success that meant he did not happen:

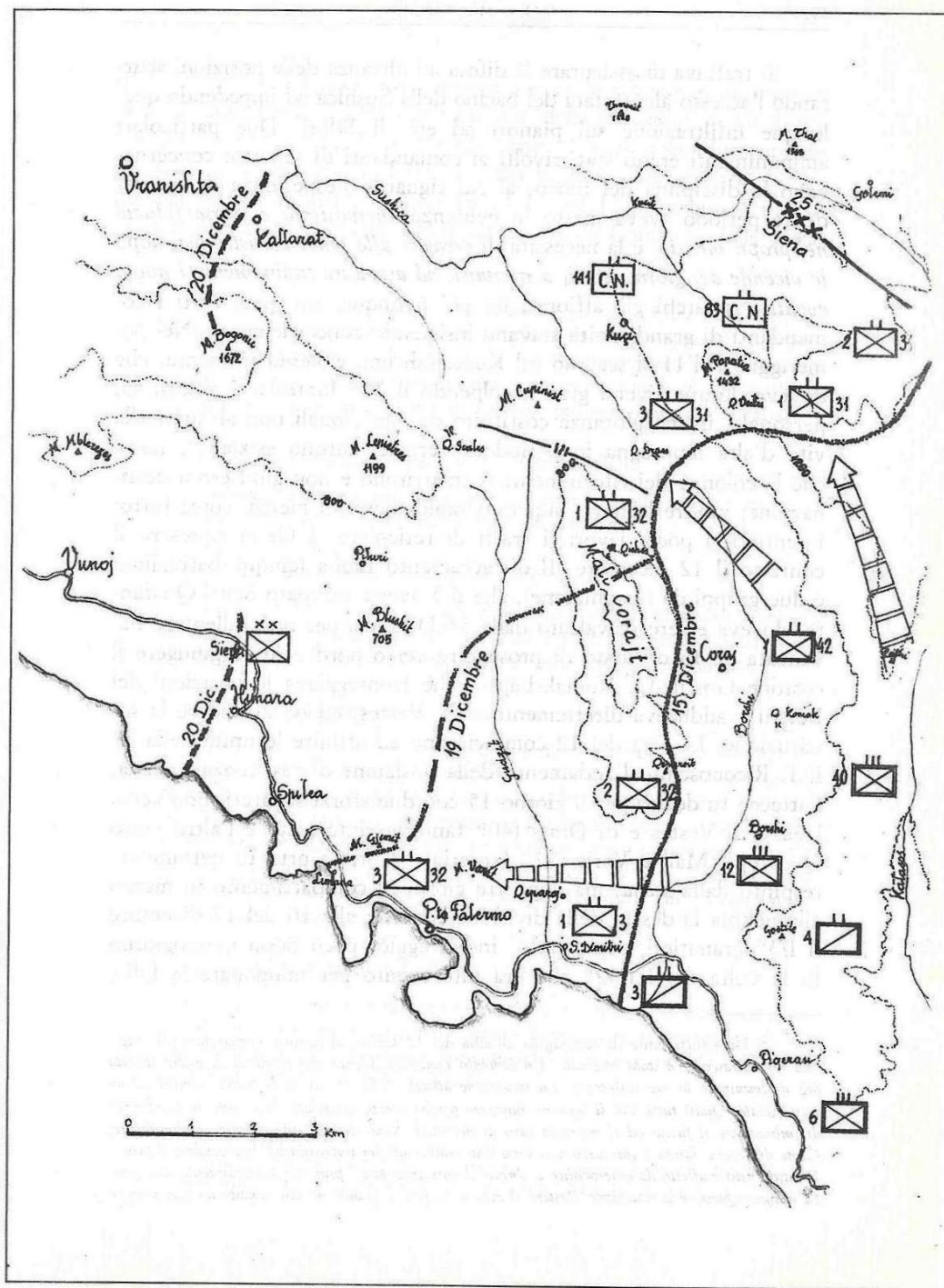
"(...) it is obvious that every day that passes before reaching this objective is a gift for the enemy, because it facilitates in the attempt to reorder himself and eventually to reinforce himself. Therefore, thanks to the efforts of the units of the C A. that they have widely exceeded the most optimistic forecasts, we prevail to continue without although the minimal delay towards the attainment of the objective, by now nearest the positions already conquered (...)." ⁽⁵⁶⁾

Seem lawful to express the doubt that the task entrusted to the 2nd I.D. was too much ambitious for the forces which it arranged, or more better too much dispersive in a action sector of fifteen or so kilometers. And however sure that came to lack the feeding the effort on the Kurvelesh in the more dramatic moment for the Italian troops. And the escaping moment very rarely to be present again. In the days 20 and 21 Decembers, even if a counterattack on Progonat did not concur with the *Modena* to knit the defense of Lekdushaj to that one of Gusmara, came to blocks the Greek trying to smash in towards Salarije valley. More uncertain was the situation created in the zone of the Bus Devrit. Unfortunately the ground and the intervals not controlled allowed other infiltrations a long the gorges full of rocks of the bitter buttress, and even the occupation of the q. 927, rendering precarious therefore the safety of long transit Bences valley.

The withdraw of the *Siena* from Bistrica had happened in two parts; the first one to the height of Argirocastro; the second on the positions to the west of the Borshi torrent (sketch n. 69). The line could be defined, on the whole, fort: a normal bar respect to the origins from Piqerasi towards Valona, along the coast or for the Sushica valley, with the points of force in M. Qishes (q. 1388). M. Corajt (q. 1405) and M. Qeparajt (q. 1116), with a wall for good part full of rocks, falling on the Borshi torrent. The evening of the 7th the movement was completed without pressure from Greek part.

(56) Greek S.M.E., AP, cit, vol. III, app. 21.

IL SETTORE DEL LITORALE (15-20 DICEMBRE)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

He dealt to assure the defense to the bitter end of the positions blocking access to the head of the river basin of Sushica and was preventing any infiltration on the flat region to the east of Piluri. Two particular admonishments had been addresses to the unit commanders: concerning the discipline of the fire, to the whose care the experience of the previous period had put in evidence "*nervousness and insufficient confidence in own means*", and necessity "*to react to the instinctive tendency, after the vicissitudes of the pass days, to rest themselves, to wait supinely for the new events*": observe already a little everywhere emerged, on which all the commanders of major unit was insisting unanimously. In the afternoon of the 11th a violent torment one was loosed on the Kurvelesh, that it had to last several days, hitting the 31st infantry. The thinking of the personnel, in majority constituted by southerners not accustomed to the life of high mountain in winter period, were ruinous⁽⁵⁷⁾, so much that the columns of supply themselves lost and did not reach destination; moreover the snow, quickly exceeded a meter, covered all: the paths, the little works, the features of reticulated. The Greeks resumed the contact on 12 December. The Liuba detachment (five battalions and two recon groups), that on the 5th had occupied Santi Quaranta, it had to be climbed over by the 3rd I.D., but in order not to slow down the advance, it was ordered to continue towards north and to reach the ridge Gostile-Q. Koniak-Lajthi, that faced the positions of the Borshi and adduced directly to Q. Vestes, and thereby to attend the substitution. The evening of the 12th began to flow the units of the 3rd I.D.. Recognized the course of the position of Italian resistance the attack was decided for the day of the 15th with two separate efforts: one towards the steps of Vestes and Drass (40th infantry reinforced) and the other against Qeparoj and Mali and Varit (12th infantry). The first collision was clearly rejected by the *Siena*, , but after three days of combat in means to the fog the right of the division yielded: At 10:00 of 17 December the I/3rd Grenadiers, overwhelmed, it withdrew; a little after noon it was the time of the III/32nd that was taken part in order to plug the leak;

(57) A commander of company at dawn of the 12th wrote to his own of bdg. commander: "*the passed night has been infernal. I complain continuous. People who ask to be shot to finish their suffering. The situation puts into effect them of the 5th Cp. is of sixteen men and a non-commissioned officer. Nearly all cannot be moved because half frozen. They are not in conditions to aim the gun or the machine gun in necessity case. They are gotten depressed physically and morally. Meat of sheep, flour and corn has not been consumed for impossibility to ignite the fire. The undersigned is articulate affection from blood enterocolitis, pains and principle freezing to the left leg. This is the situation. I will remain to my place until when is remaining to me a single man*".

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

the II/32nd, reduced to little thing, still held its positions but with pain. Gen. Perugi, the new commander of the division, tried to constitute a connection from Mali and Qeparajt to Varit being made to come down from the northern field the III/31st, but the breach was opened. The sequence of the messages between 12:30 and 14:30 of the 17th is extremely meaningful circa the moment in which the Commander of the *Siena* found himself:

- from the 11th Army to the *Siena* (12:30 hours):

"028252 stop Your sector naturally more strong whole Army front & mainly decorated troops & artillery stop Every yielding is incompressible & impossible stop Sir report immediately you tactical command to Himara stop I put at your disposition the only element of which I order stop one motorcyclists cp. stop Is necessary more energy & more audacity",

- from the 32nd infantry to the *Siena* (12:40 hours):

"situation still more serious nearly indefensible stop we have put online also the stretchers stop We are all in the position",

- from the *Siena* to the 11th Army (hours 12,45):

"2246 stop the enemy pressure on the right wing more and more strong stop we have counterattacked with all forces available stop a bdg. of the left wing is coming down on Maja Gjemit stop Battalion CC.RR. still not arrived",

- from the 31st infantry to the *Siena* (14:10 hours):

"At 9:30 hours with the troops under my orders... snow rages today gives beyond 48 hours stop Lacking connection provisions distribution impossible absolute lack of firewood stop troop very gather from the chill fortunately not still... in spite of all vigilance service it is acquitted in way... with sacrifices stop Paths beyond two meters in snow with few tools provided... Situation still more serious for forces located beyond XXV C.A. (58) stop Maximum effort with every sacrifice stop It is absolutely necessary that armed forces high commands know the exact situation ",

- from 11th Army to the *Siena* (14:35 hours):

"028298 stop Huge enemy forces which was alluded to in your 2246 not to attain in your area the amount of forces at your disposition benefited from defensive attitude stop Keep in mind for your absolute right necessity to maintain Mali and Varit obstruction".

(58) On the Mali That they were found isolated, the rests of the *Bolzano* battalion, which the conditions, were dramatic: forty men, including officials, of the which half not in a position to fight.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

The fight continued until to dark then weakened: also the 12th Greek infantry, that had lead the attack on Qeparoj, seriously was tried having lost approximately 400 men. The successive day Gen. Perugi specified the Commander of the army that his right, comprised the III/31st in course of movement from Q. Vestes, amounted to approximately 1,000 men, an insufficient total in order to assure the defense, and, since the yielding total of the line in correspondence of the shoreline would have had most serious consequences, requested the urgent dispatch for two battalions in perfect efficiency. But worse happened soon after: at 11:40 the commander of the 32nd infantry communicated that in the previous night the regiment was be forced to withdraw with the remainder of its battalions, comprised that it defended the positions of Mali Corajt. While the Commando of the *Siena* decided to withdraw the right wing from the gulf of Limana to M. Gjemit in order to agree again then to Mali Corajt - nearly in the same moment the commander of the *Modena* ordered the withdraw on Gusmara and Lekdushaj - both Gen. Geloso and the Gen. Soddu ordered that the emplacements of Mali and Varit and Mali and Qeparojt are retaken at any cost of sacrifice:

"It is communicated to General Perugi that I do not understand the abandonment Port Palermo after predisposed defense & given communications & enemy forces assessed *stop Siena* Commander with competition from You arranged already⁽⁵⁹⁾ & using all his rears personal tries at all costs to retake the abandoned positions General *stop Soddu*"⁽⁶⁰⁾.

But at dawn of 19th the fight was rekindling violently: before against Q. Drass, then it was increased at Q. Vestes, finally extended to all the front. They were taken place here and there fluctuations, until some units, exhausted, yielded. That evening Maja and Gjemit was occupied by the Greeks, thereafter Q. Drass and Kuçi. For more the interruption of every connection with 31st the infantry rendered it makes impossible any idea of the plug of the breach of the line. The garrison Mai Papathia (a cc.nn bdg..) a pair of days still resists then encircled and lacking in provisions and ammunitions, surrendered. By now it became unavoidable to try support on positions still more rear, since the few reinforcements scraped together from the army -II/17th infantry and two cp. bers. - did not have way

(59) The message was addressed to the 11th Army for forwarding it to the *Siena*.

(60) DSCSFAA, tele 2717/op. dated 19.12.1940, retransmitted by the 11th Army with tele 028405/op. dated 19.12.1940, 04:15 hours.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

to change the created situation. The new line of resistance ran largely from Himara to Kallarat. Its organization came entrusted to the special army corps.

5. THE GREEK OFFENSIVE OF THE YEAR-END ON THE FRONT OF THE 11th ARMY

All the front of the 11th Army jumped in alternating itself of short pauses and of violent hits. Many were the precarious features - every army corps of had at least a pair - , but the threat from the shoreline made to pass the rest in second place. In the delay of the program of reinforcements coming from Italy, a battalion of the 17th infantry and four battalions of *camicie nere*, Gen. Geloso wanted personally to go to Valona in order to accelerate of the starting in to the line:

"Nothing I have found on arrival - he wrote to Gen. Soddu, as soon as returned to Fieri - predicted only in arrival in order today some steamboats of materials, draft animals and a little more than a thousand men. In this moment it is absolute necessity to compete in speed with the enemy, than - as it is known - it is found little more than 50 kilometers from Valona. It is my duty to repeat, Excellency, than with the leftovers of the *Siena* and only - I say only - the battalion of 17th infantry, is vain to hope in a defense that gives certainty to maintain the positions.

I return to say: they are necessary to me at once and in the way more absolute fresh, organic and complete unit. For which if in a day, or to the maximum in the next night on the 21st, it will not be supplied makes *to reach in zone* the troops promised me, and that is still lacking the battalion of the 17th, two cc.nn. Bns of the *Acqui* and others two solid cc.nn, Bns will not be able to avoid - in spite of every possible resistance and reaction - serious consequences for Valona, than only the planned counterattack could avoid it (...)⁽⁶¹⁾ ".

While after to have conferred with Gen. Cavallero, had taken the first provisions in order to constitute, on various scale, the sector of the Shoreline.

In the month of November arrived in Albania the Commander of the special army corps (Gen. Messe), to the suit of the organs of - command but lacking in troops. Initially it was remained to disposition of the Comando Superiore, but, seen the course of the things, in the afternoon of the 19th he was placed to the dependencies of the 11th Army in order "*to guarantee absolute integrity of Valona and of its hinterland*" ⁽⁶²⁾, in the sector comprised between the alignment Mali That – Mureve - Q. Pisces – Çipini - Smokthina and

61) DS Command 11th Army, f. 028524/op. dated 20.12.1940.

62) In the night on the 19th the enemy preformed a naval incursion on Valona.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the sea. The order of battle of the new army corps felt the effects evidently with the circumstances, since more or less was dealt than to put with all that that was of available in Albania:

- division *Acqui* (Gen. Mariotti): 17th infantry, 18th legion cc.nn. with two Bns., two cp. bersaglieres of the 5th (already in reinforcement to the *Siena*) and unit of support;
- special mountain division (Gen. Piazzoni): 2nd alpine with two Bns., a regiment of cavalry on foot (with three groups), two cp. machine-gunners of position and unit of support;
- troops of C.A.: various units, among which two Bns. tanks and, in according to weather, previewed reorder and completion, the *Siena*.

The line, held to the better one from the units in place, was now decidedly unfavorable to the defense, in part because struck from the opposing positions established nearly everywhere on the more elevated heights, in part because the chain of the Mali Çikes, constituted for its impervious nature a sour diaphragm between the coastal selva and the Sushica valley, determined between the two sectors one discontinuity zone. Not only, but the positions on the shoreline turned out much more advances than those of the Sushica valley. Such circumstances represented one reason of weakness of the defense and a reason of constant worry. To add that the intense and incessant rains had given origin to impetuous torrent that they were transforming the level zones of the valley bottoms and the same roadway in only muddy region, while on the high positions the violent storm and the extended snow storm raged. Between the two sectors the Sushica valley situation was that one where was shown more strongly delicate, for the modest forces therein located (the rest of the 31st infantry and the cavalry rgt. an on foot) and because further progresses by the enemy how much could have irremediable compromised as well as the possibilities of defense of Valona the alignment of entire the XXV Corps. On the coastal strip things appear in that moment less dangerous but not little precarious. The information on the Greeks was rather discordant, however generally they stretched to indicate them like "*at the end of the resources*", that it spurred to take initiatives of counterattacks in order to lighten the pressure and to earn breath and time. Beyond to that it must say that Gen. Cavallero had rendered the order of Mussolini famous "*to pass without delay to the offensive, everywhere fresh troops are had, with precedence on the front of the 11th Army, where the enemy is attacking in order to reach Valona*". The examination of the situation, already made before with Soddu and then with Geloso, came resumed in depth in a meeting held at Rrogozhine

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

at 22:30 of 20 December to the commanders of Armies and it carried to the confirmation of the three counterattacks already decided from Soddu, to the aim to arrest the left of the Greek forces, to restore the resistance position on the positions occupied before the recent inflection and to remove from the adversary the initiative. On such basis, Gen. Geloso circulated his own directives. It was proposed to deliver within and not beyond 25 December violent and impetuous efforts along the more profitable directions, taking advantage of also, where possible, the employment of medium tanks in order to throw the Greek device into disorder. However, considering the single actions he ordered to the special C A. (from the Sushica valley and along the coastal selva, with the cooperation of the *Bolzano* Bn. departing from Mali That) and to the XXV Corps (towards Golemi with the eventual cooperation of elements of the *Ferrara* from Bus Devrit), must convene that it was be a matter of actions that did not exit from the local area. And, in the light of the here acquired experiences since, are even lawful to doubt that troops just arrived from Italy and immediately introduced into the fight they possessed a mordant and a such psychological superiorities to obtain a *sure* success to the first engagement. When then mind to the real quantitative availability of men for such "counter-offensive" and to the deficiencies of logistic character is placed, the doubts cannot that increase. In any case still the inflow was not completed of the units of the special army corps that the Greeks attacked again.

And so undoubtedly had serious problems to resolve. At the end of December Gen. Kosmas, commander of the I Corps, sent own chief of the S.M. to Gianina in order to deliver - and to comment orally - a comparison letter on the state in which the army corps was found:

"I have the honor to transmit the reports of the 3rd and 4th division with respect to their conditions and for informing that the 2nd division, to the taken with the same difficulties, finds in an analogous situation to that one of the other units. II C.A., not having elements of judgment on the entire army of on the adversary, is not in a position to expressing an opinion responsible on the developments of the events. However it cannot neglect the fact that continuous ours to go away from the evidently bases will multiply the difficulties while, for converged, the withdraw of the enemy towards its bases will facilitate it considerably. Consequently the imminent efforts in order to break off the defensive position of Valona (...) demand fresh forces and complete equipment, than the conditions he puts into effect of the C A. cannot assure, especially in relation to the strong deficiency of baggage train. But also the greatest strategic importance of Valona, whose conquest will have most serious repercussions on the adversary for all the conflict, does not advise to a suspension but a continuation of the fight with abundant average new units and that to the maximum level only are in measure

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

to estimate if available. However, where impossible the shipment of reinforcements, [only] the immediate elimination put into effect the personnel and draft animals deficiencies will allow with the army corps to continue in the action without having to interrupt"⁽⁶³⁾.

As it is seen, it was clearly to the mind of the Greek commanders that was necessary to strike as long as the iron was hot. While in the sector of Kamia the difficulties of the supply for the III body were important and became dramatic when at the end of December, for some day, the supply and evacuation line Florina-Korça was interrupted by the snow, the I and II Corps instead will insist in the attempt to smash in towards Valona or Berat (sketch n. 70).

On the direction of Valona the Greek offensive resumed taken the start against the remainders of the *Siena* when still the inflow was not completed of the units of the special army corps. It had beginning 22 December with attacks on several points of the front, assumed particular violence from the 26 to the 28 in Sushica valley, moved in the period 28-30 December on the shoreline, where manifested with the maximum intensity during all the day of 4 January. For some days the *Siena* - approximately 700 men in Sushica valley, at the height of Vranishta, and a thousand to north of Himara - held the line supporting it to the better with the first unit to arrive, while the special mountain division was collected; but the instability symptoms were obvious. Gen. Perugi felt in must mean to Gen. Messe that the conditions of the pictures, the troop, the armament, the equipment, the draft animals were such to make to consider necessary to reorder immediate of the major unit. In addition, of the reinforcements received: some unit had manifested an excessive impressionability; the II Bn. light tanks could count on twelve tanks {of the twenty-one departing from Valona} of efficiency than more uncertain; the two bersaglieres cp. had the highest moral but they did not have that one fifty of men each. Of other part also in Sushica valley the things were not introduced well: the slowness in the arrival of the regiments and means and the insistent opposing pressure imposed see again the original design. Held account that already many units of the *Acqui* had been absorbed from the defense of the shoreline and that the 31st had become necessary substitution of infantry - by now

63) Greek S.M.E., op, cit, vol. III, pag. 193. The S.M. Chief, to equipment of represented how much, asked very soon another division, specifying that with such reinforcement the C.A, "*assumed the engagement to occupy Valona, to have nothing to do with from the development of the operations in the area of the II Corps*". The Supreme Command, held account of that, promised the division.

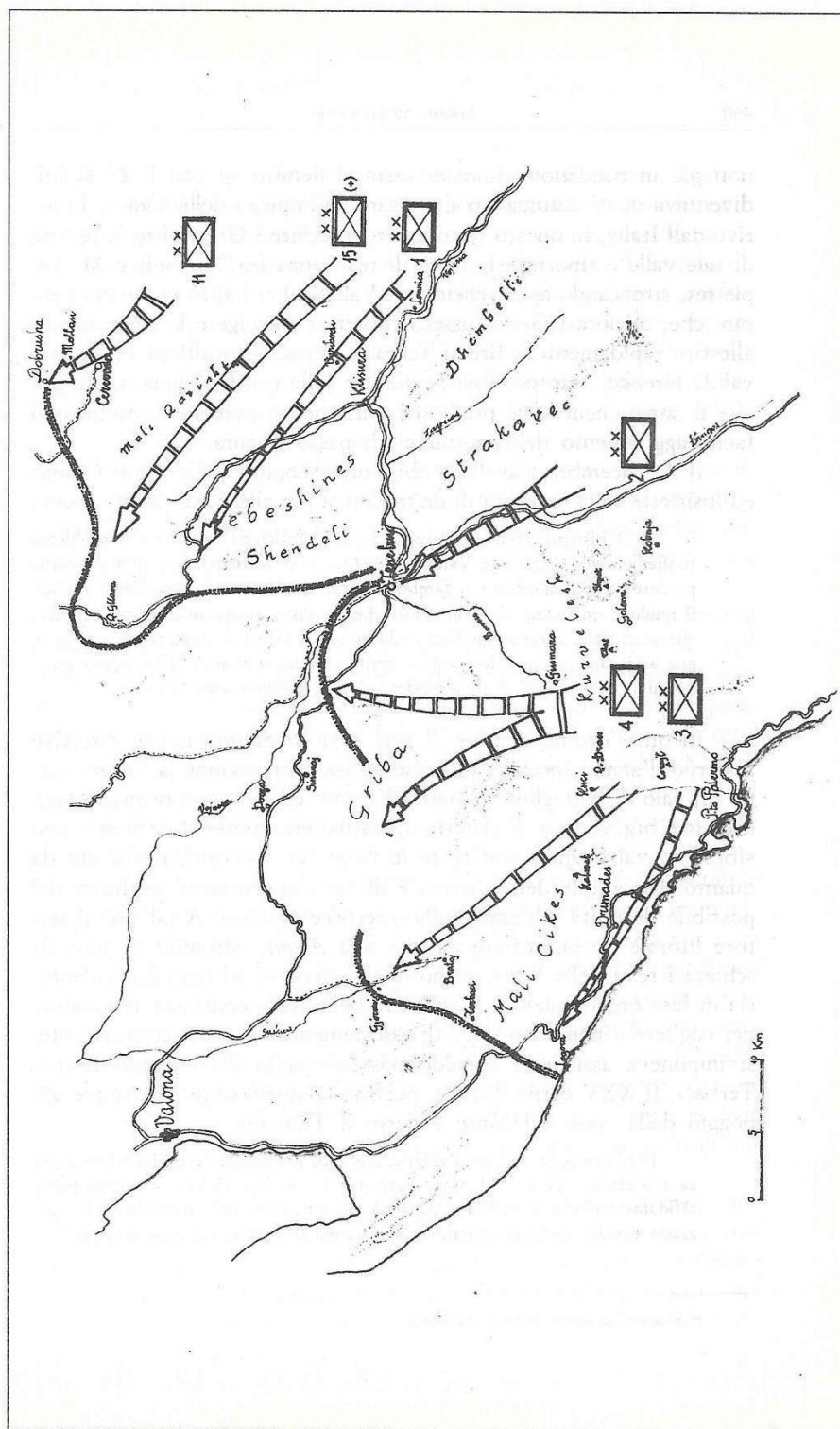
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 399

The operating design with the Greek offensive of the yearend

Schizzo n. 70

IL DISEGNO OPERATIVO DELL'OFFENSIVA GRECA DI FINE ANNO



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

not more in conditions than to hold head to the enemy - with the 2nd alpine, employment became nearly automatic thinking on the employment of the *Cuneo*, in arrival from Italy, this sector in order drive out the Greeks beyond the head of the valley and to bring back the line of resistance between Thmonit and M. Lepietres, being demolished every desire for Valona. Among other things it was necessary to think that, in case the Greeks were resolutions to sweep up the quickly prepared obstruction at Brataj- Terbacì, no other truly valid defense would have been possible to realize on the way of Valona, much more than the overcoming of the foretold obstruction the easy encircling of the positions of Logora pass would have allowed.

On 26 December Cavallero had a talk to Fieri with Geloso and insisted on the necessity of an initiative in order to lighten the situation:

"(...) he must take breath in front of Valona: this is the fundamental problem. Today he urges Valona (...). Must here march and we cannot lose time. The effect would be made to feel the effects on the rest. Verlaçi has said to me, which he is a man of good sense that it has seen just in other circumstances, than if it still keeps for ten-twelve days the smashed the Greeks (...) must attack in order to take endured breath to Valona ahead. I cannot take the responsibility to attend. We cannot wait for" ⁽⁶⁴⁾.

In this order of ideas, Gen. Geloso circulated new directives to the special Army Corp, putting to its disposition the *Cuneo*, except a pair of battalions he sent to Klisura, and the *Galbiati* grouping (three cc.nn. Bns.). The operating criterion was to exercise the maximum effort in Sushica valley with all forces located therein, reinforced as much as available from the *Cuneo*, and it makes you to allow, in the limits of the possible, the units deployed on the coastal direction. To such aim the shoreline field had to be passed to the *Acqui*, withdrawn into the second lines the rests of the *Siena*, except the artilleries and, in any case, it is in phase organization - that it was well was contracted to the maximum in order to pick the enemy in arrangement crisis - and attack during, was prevailed to assure the balance possession of the Brataj-Terbaci obstruction. The XXV Corps had, for its account, to supply particular support from the zone of the Mureve towards the Thmonit:

For the resolution of this action, that it is of pre-eminent and understood them importance to the effects operated of all the army - concluded Geloso - I make full load confidence on the engineers and organizational ability to the commanders of every degree and on the moral firmness and combative of my heroic troops "

64) Cavallero Diary, dated 26.12.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Of usual the callback to the spirit of initiative in organizational field is implicit admission that the logistic apparatus is insufficient to need. It was therefore also in this case and heavy burden a small example: for being able to make to reach in employment zone at least the group from 75/13 *Pinerolo*, the special body was authorized "*to reach the necessary draft animals from those in unloaded at Valona to whichever unit they belongs*"! On the 28th Cavallero got briefed from Gen. Messe on the situation in Sushica valley: the 2nd alpine now had in the line three battalions (*Saluzzo*, *Dronero* and *Borgo S. Dalmazzo*) and, if the insistent efforts with which the Greek 3rd Inf. Div. tried to smash in had caused some fluctuation, substantially it seemed reached a clear equilibrium; also on the shoreline, where the 32nd infantry had been busiest, the things seemed to arrange. For the organization of the counter-offensive he calculated to have need of four or five days, it is worth to say it are ready for the 2 or 3 January.

On 27 December the situation of the 11th Army could therefore be synthesized. right wing (special army corps): the continuity of the Greek attacks in Sushica valley and along the coast had determined one be of fact of real gravity to the effects of the safety of Valona, from which the obstruction to south of Brataj toed be one distant hardly forty of kilometers. Center (XXV Corps): The furrow Tepeleni-Klisura permaneva exposed to threat because of the opposing insistence on the Qarishta and Fratarit, hinge of the northern defense of Klisura, and against Progonat-Gusmara, whose fall the easy winding of the cross roads of Tepeleni would have concurred, the interruption of the roadway Tepeleni- Valona and the turning of the defense of Sushica valley through the furrow of the Smokthina. Left wing (VIII Corps): serious threat of the Osum velley, where the *Pusteria*, attacked frontally and on the flank from Tomorreces valley for Mali Kulmakes, had been forced to fold to the height of Q. Sirakut, creating a solution of continuity with the positions of Çerevode, at the protected moment only from the unfordable Osum. The provisions taken were not sure decisive, but they constituted all which was possible to make, reaching forces here there they were found, not to be connected with - for the nth time - from organic ties.

The issue of Valona was truly the thought number one by gen. Geloso, so muchthat it thought opportune to write a letter of precise definition to Gen. Messe) in which, after to have summarized the measures assumed in order to assure a series of positions of to the rear.) he confirmed that "*the defense of Valona is essential and pre-eminent task of*

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the special army corps of Your command. The troops located however to such goal on the above direction remembered and those of the garrison of Valona (except the elements of the R. Navy) depend directly on You ".

A second reason to worry concerned the Kurvelesh. The regression of the *Siena* had rendered tactically the defense of the Mali That indefensible, where still it resisted isolated from all a handful of alpine, for which the welding point between special and XXV army corps was established, starting from 22 December, on the Thmonit.

The Greek 4th Inf. Div. was also to taken with the tremendous climatic conditions and logistic difficulties. From 8 December, the day of its entrance into action, to the 21st had lost approximately 4,000 men, two thirds of which for freezing of varied degree, and 2,800 draft animals; the efforts, therefore, pause of some days ordered in order to continue towards the Vojussa valley could only resume on the 25th. Ahead of it (sketch n. 71): the field Salarije valley was held from the rest of the I and II/42nd, II/47th (complements), the *Bolzano* and, especially from the II/18th infantry from the *Acqui* coming from Salarije; the area of the *Modena* had of two hundred men of II and III/3rd grenadiers, of one hundred forty men of the III/42nd, ninety men of the III/29th artillery, two hundred fifty of the 36th and 82nd cc.nn. Bns. and approximately two hundred men of the XIV and XXIV bersaglieres Bns., let alone of the I and III/18th infantry (800 men). The *Modena*, once occupied the line of the strong points with the 18th infantry, withdrew the other troops in the town of Lekdushaj in order to reorder them in unit formation and to reconstitute the divisional reserve. But a serious disadvantage had been taken place. To the action of the withdraw from strong points 38, to the origin of the buttress of Mali Paldiës, had not been occupied at once in, night of the 19th like the others two, and this had concurred with formations of the Greek 2nd Inf. Div. the conquest of the vital feature of the same strong point, Hill. 1430, and the possibility to come down without many difficulties until to Mali Paldiës. The morning of the 21st the III/18th was only sent to occupy the strong point, but the battalion had to fight until late at night in order resuming the hill 1430 and still the following day in order to reject the repeated Greeks attempts. When then, the afternoon of the 22nd, was about to move towards north in order to hunt the enemy from Mali Paldiës found obstacle in the fire bases that give the semicircle of hills to the West of the Bus Devrit swept the buttress and had to arrest itself. General Rossi, who came to acquaintance of the particular only the 24th, expressed much hardly, considering the success like "*one of the most serious disadvantages deriving from the hurried and disordered withdraw*

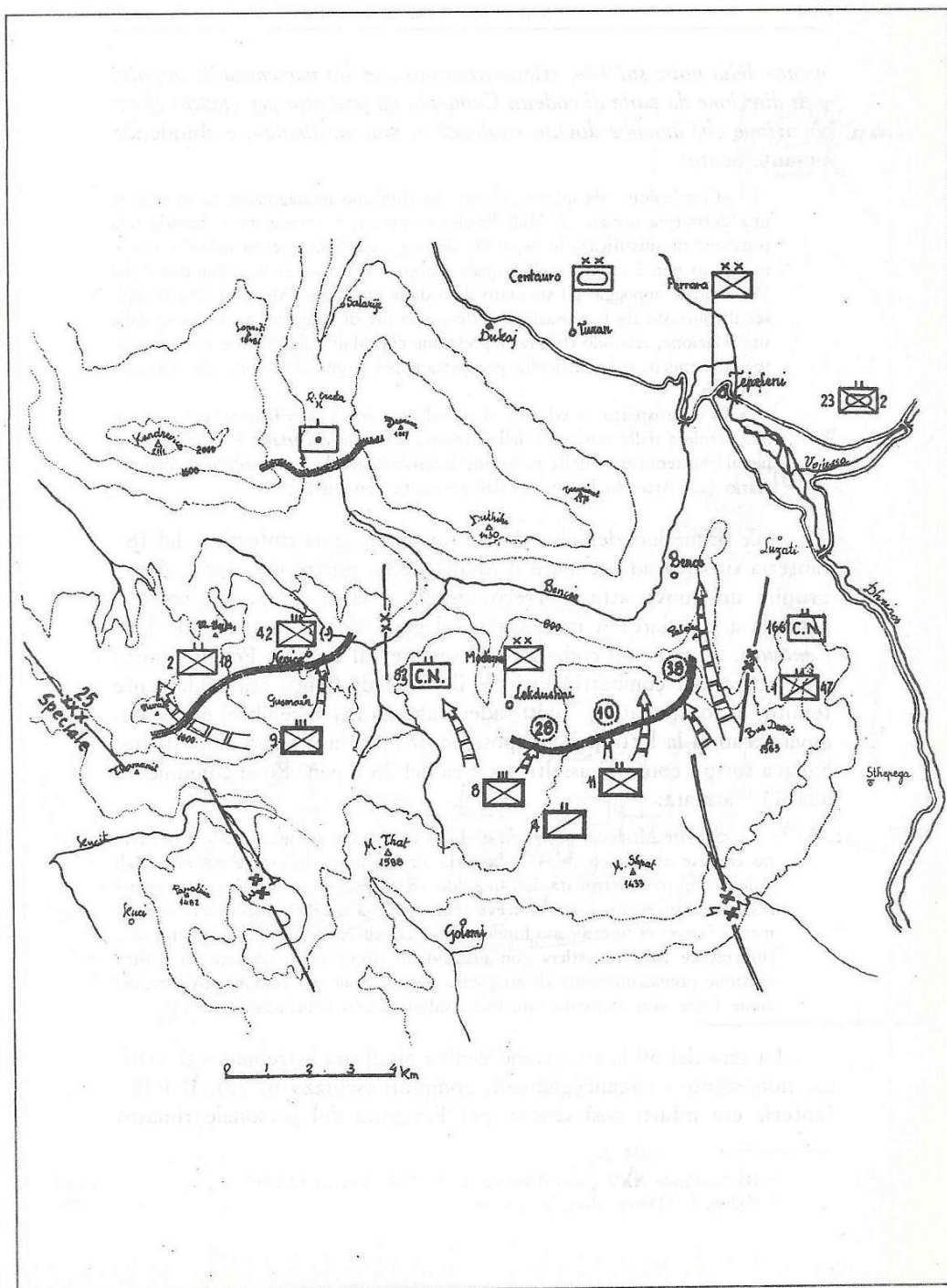
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 403

The sector of the Kurvalesh (25-31 December)

Schizzo n. 71

IL SETTORE DEL KURVELESH (25-31 DICEMBRE)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of the night of the 19th, censuring that "the lack of impulse and of direction from part of that Commander have continued for four day an action that have must resolve in one morning", and close heavy:

"Conclusion: from four days of imaginary optimism attended a definitive news of occupied Mali Palciës, and instead is sent to me a relation of negative justifications, program and without will. Still now it is not clearly moreover which task has had the commander of the 18th and whose support has been given from the Division. Less still the contrast between the feeling of the commander of regiment, turning out from its report, second is understood which it was impression that Mali Palciës was not occupied by the enemy, and the difficulties shown then to justification of the success lacked.

I show you - and indeed your memo - that Mali Palciës, in order to find itself to the hinge of the positions of the *Modena* divisions and *Fenara*, is fundamental for the maintenance of the defensive position puts into effect, and I order you to conquer it (...) I await the news of a successful conquest "⁽⁶⁵⁾.

In the first lights of the dawn of the 25th a reinforced company of the 18th infantry succeeded to occupy the Mali Palciës; but, unfortunately, at dark a new Greek attack overwhelmed the company forcing it to withdraw. To midnight, the gen. Mallets, commander of the *Centauro*, assumed the command of the val Bençes sector. In order more days continued the combats: if the region of Bençe were securely held, the contrasted hill 1430 still fell (27 Decembers) and was rekindling the heated fight for strong point 38. Also strong point 10 shaken under the continuous onslaught. The evening of the 28th gen. Rossi communicated to the 11th Army:

"Modena sector: positions hills 1430-1413 tirelessly but up to now in vain contrasted by the enemy from the 18th infantry *stop* Therefore situation Mali Palciës ridge not more controlled from strong point 38 it has gotten worse *stop* Numerous opposing centers of resistance, fates in short time until hill 997, disturb alignment *Ferrara* & forbid bottom Bencia valley *stop* enemy nuclei continuously come down until mule track with prejudgment *Modena* supply *stop* our reaction mostly of artillery because as already communicated disproportion forces it does not allow tangible results to ours counterattacks *stop* "⁽⁶⁶⁾.

The evening of the 30th the situation was judged extremely critical, although the completed adaptation (sketch n. 72). The I/18th infantry in fact therefore was shaken, for the smallness of the personnel remaining

65) DS Commander XXV army corps, f. 2871/op. dated 24.12.1940.

66) Ibid, f. 3118/op. dated 28.12.1940.

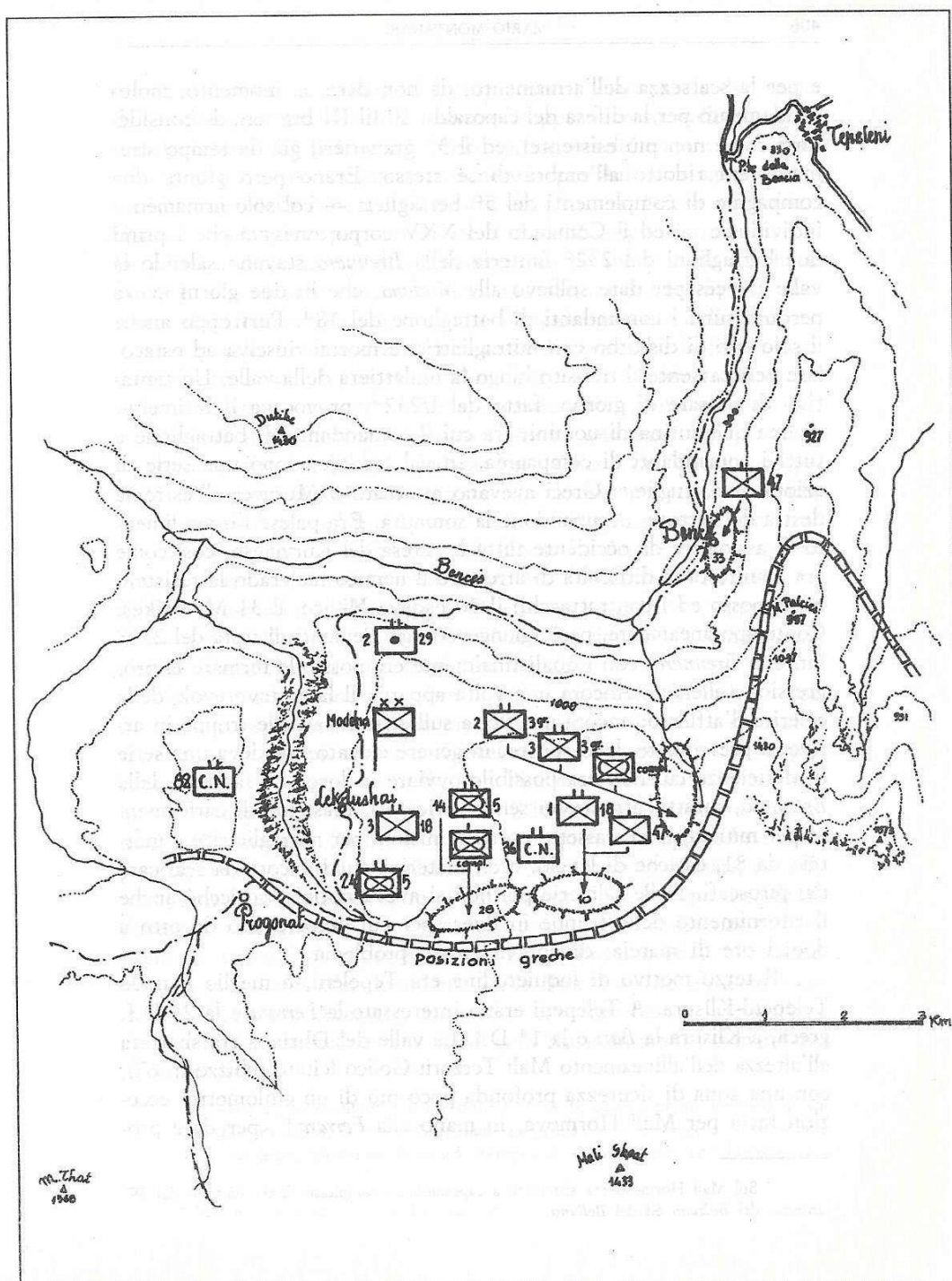
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 406

The situation of the *Modena* division on 31 December

Schizzo n. 72

LA SITUAZIONE DELLA D.F. «MODENA» IL 31 DICEMBRE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

and for the lack of the armament, not to give, at the moment, much confidence for the defense of strong point 10 (III Bn. was from considering itself as not more existing), and the 3rd grenadiers, already for a long time exhausted, was reduced to the shadow of if itself. They were but arrived two companies of complements of the 5th bersaglieres - with the only individual armament - and the Commander of the XXV Corps informed that the first two the 232nd battalions of infantry of the *Brennero* were climbing the Bençes valley for giving relief to the *Modena*, that in two days had lost all the battalion commanders of the 18th. Unfortunately also only the fire of disturbance with machine-guns and mortars the succeeded to hinder painfully the long transit of the valley mule track. An attempt to pass by day, made by the I/232nd, provoked to the wounding of one group of forty of men, among which the commander of battalion and all the company commanders. In the Salarije valley, after a series of actions of patrols, the Greeks had attacked the Mureve, to the extreme right of the field, occupying some the top. The understanding to turn from the West was evident all the defense of the Kurvelesh, therefore as the difficulty was manifest to arrest the enemy in spite of the resistance in place and the counterattacks: on the 30th Nivice fell, the 31st M. Beikes. At the same time, but, the elements of head of the 231st infantry Brennero arrived, with which finally it was possible to stop the Greek progression. Once again the unfavorable side of the speed of inflow appeared; once again the efficiency of the troops in arrival, have nothing to do with the spirit, in elevated kind, it affected a series of deficiencies which it was not possible to obviate in the area. The infantries of the *Brennero*, in fact, arrived without loaders, plates of loading for machine-guns, cassettes door ammunitions for machine-gun and 81 mm mortar, charges of launch, etc, materials all tied up at unload from the steamboats. Of the baggage train then news was not had, so that also the refueling of the troops online, for which they were necessary from eight to twelve hours of march, became large problem.

The third Restlessness reason was Tepeleni, or better the Telepeni-Klisura crossroad. To Telepeni the *Ferrara* and the Greek 2nd Inf. Div. were interested, at Klisura the *Bari* and the 1st Inf. Div. They of the Dhrinos valley was crossed to the height of the alignment Mali Terzorit -Golico (cited sketch n. 67), with a zone of deep safety little more than a kilometer, with exception made for Mali Hormova, in hand to *Ferrara*⁽⁶⁷⁾, for giving depth

67) On the Mali Hormova a complex of three platoons was arranged in strong points: of the 48th infantry, the *Bolzano* and the *Belluno*.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

in ahead to the Golico. The Greek I Corps, inasmuch as the two sides of the valley involved a onerous effort too much, sped up the commander of the 2nd Inf. Div., Gen. Labdas, to neglect them, within sure limits, and to turn instead every attention to the possibility to act against the device of the *Ferrara* on the right of the Dhrinos. Lekeli was the objective for catching up, in order to achieve which the army corps would have placed to disposition of the division also batteries of heavy artillery. To find that not as well as one breach of the front attained the Greek Commander, how much the attainment of the Vojussa: in other words, the elimination of the bridgehead that the *Ferrara* had established to south of Tepeleni. "*the division would have gotten rid not only of a front dead for the offensive operations but also of one constant threat, since an enemy held bridgehead cause of losses and uneasiness*"⁽⁶⁸⁾. Gen. Labdas fixed the beginning of the operation for 28 December. For how much delivered with decision the attack, quickly faded on the Bus Bevrit, he did not succeed to obtain any result of in Dhrinos valley of against Mali Hormova. Also in Zagorias valley, where infantry operated a detachment based on the 34th, the action was rejected to Pesclani and on the Brezhanit. Here it succeeded to resist, grabbed hold of to the rocky summit, *Val Natisone* Bn. reduced to the commander, four subordinate and about seventy of alpine.

In short, at the end of December, the serious problem for the XXV Corps was the consolidation of the precarious line of resistance on the northern edge of the plateau of the Kurvelesh. To such goal it came employed the *Brennero* (Gen. Berardi), with the assignment to gradually replace the troops in the two sectors in which the front of the *Modena* it had been divided, to re-establish the defense the unit retaking in the order strong points 38, 39 (Mali Palciës) and 9 (village of Progonat), and finally to keep themselves in measure to act offensively. All the replaced units had to be collected behind of the resistance position in order then to re-enter to the belongings bodies, less the *Bolzano* and the 18th infantry, that they passed to the dependencies of the *Brennero*. But an other argument became necessary to face with frankness: the issue of the levels of force of the units. And gen. Rossi it admonished the subordinate commanders:

"I have had occasion to state as in this first period of pause on the positions, the force that remains in front line is reduced and it is lost weight in impressive way. I as an example cite elements of the 18th infantry (I and.

68) Greek S.M.E., op, cit, vol. III, page 190.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

II bn.) that, arrived online on the forehead of the "Modena" division on 20 Decembers last, of at a distance of only ten days have been reduced of approximately 7/10 of their organic force. This fact is explained essentially for the following reasons: little cohesion and consistency of the squares; weakness and tolerance towards the inferior; impression of the adversary; insufficient action of control from part of the CC.RR. in the immediate rears.

Practically verification that the every wounded, also not serious, embezzles to the combat several of its companions, than stretchers are improvised in order to go away from the line. Moreover:

- the soldiers who often go to the health sections a lot are supplied of prescribed sanitary documents;
- the sanitary ones are too much tender in the acknowledgment of the wounded and of becomes ill and clear with much military facility that, after some day of cures, can be sends back to the line;
- retired military they come cleared in too much far localities.

I have asked more times the situation for the force and me always he has reached full of omissions and inaccuracies. Callback seriously on these facts the interested Commandets and I will think responsibility of the battalion and company commanders and especially those of regiment, which answers me in full load of all the moral and combative force of own regiment.

I have noticed then that the force increases considerably not hardly the units comes withdrawn from the line and still grows more in the demands for the provisioning. I invite the commanders to meditate on such figures (...) "⁽⁶⁹⁾.

The problems of the army corps were evidently also those of the army that added them. In the battle of arrest of December Gen. Geloso very soon noticed that the defensive new position could not securely be held from the same units that give the Kalamas and from the Pindo they had withdrawn fighting. The Greek II Corps had circulated since from 18 December the operations order for the resumption of the offensive. It had decided to invest all the sector of the Italian VIII Corps being exercised the main effort along the ridge of the Mali Qarishta (cited sketch n. 70). 15th Inf. Div., supported from the 5th brigade and reinforced from other units, it was protagonist: to smash in the front of the *Julia* and to continue towards the chain of the Mali Trebeshines. The flanks were assured from the 11th Inf. Div. that, operating on the right of the Osum, had to reach Dobrusha, and from the 1st Inf. Div. to which the conquest of Klisura was entrusted. The beginning of the attack was fixed for 23 December. Those snowy morning, under a covered cloud sky, the three divisions left the lines of departure between the 09:30 and noon. The 15th did not have happy fate: it advanced with the 5th brigade (5th and 52nd infantry) on a front of attack of approximately three kilometers against

69) DS Command XXV Army corps, f. 15/op. dated 1.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the Qarishta and Fratarit. To right there was the I/33rd for the safety of the flank; still more to right the 50th infantry had to engage the rest of the divisional sector: seven or eight kilometers. In reserve they remained the 33rd (less a battalion) and the 28th infantry. In course of arrival the 9th infantry. The effort therefore was huge and for more applied nearly exactly on the point of stitches between *Julia* (Fratarit) and *Bari* (south slopes of the Fratarit). For seven hours following there were assault and counterassault; at dark the 9th alpine still maintained the possession of the Qarishta and Fratarit, but the southern ridge had fallen and the troops of *Bari* had been forced to bending, forming a defensive flank towards north and unavoidably leaving an void on the right of the *Julia*.

The fight resumed the following day. For four times the Greeks launch themselves against the Fratarit and for four times they were rejected, unfortunately to most expensive price both in totals losses and in the highest percentage of dead or hurt officers. Also from Greek side the events were however not seen with much optimism: in the first twenty-four hours the two regiments in first group had not only had 28 officials and 631 soldiers outside combat⁽⁷⁰⁾ and some units were withdrawn in disorder; but the second day, in means to the torments of snow, the reaction of the defenders was such to impose a rest.

In the north the 11th Inf. Div., passing with a share of its forces from Q. Devris, had succeeded to reach, after violent hand to hand, until to the town of Mollasi, but thereafter had been firmly stopped; in the south the 1st Inf. Div. had not succeeded to conquer the ridge of Varibodi on which the left wing of *Bari* was kept. These results, the persistent bad weather and the necessity of resupplying of ammunition and rations obligated Gen. Papadopoulos to order at 17:00 of the 24th the temporary suspension of the offensive, limiting operating activities to the sure consolidation of the positions reached and in the understanding that, once feasible, the first objective to conquer would have been the Qarishta and Fratarit, *conditio sine qua non* for the prosecution of the advance along the ridge of the Mali Qarishta in how much it did not constitute the best line of departure here both for the Greeks to the ends of the breach of the front of the *Julia*, and for Italian counterattacks. Moreover its possession allowed the use of the mule track from Lomniça for the supply. In this guideline the 15th Inf. Div. had to create the premises for such operation adequately, organizing in depth on which had succeeded

70) Greek S.M.E., op. cit., vol. III, page 159.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to assert itself; the 11th Inf. Div. could pass the Osum to Çerevode, if in a position to exceeding the obstacle without to render the advanced participation necessary; the 1st Inf. Div. was free to try to acquire the feature of the north ridge of Varibodi, if thought indispensable.

The same evening of the 24th gen. Bancale received news from the three sectors. From the *Pusteria* was communicated a wide bending of the left, but the conservation of Çerevode and the passes Kulmakes and Sirakut. From the *Julia* there was transmitted an eloquent message of the commander of the 9th alpine: "*the positions are still in our possession, but the conditions of the troop strongly tried from the combats and the bad weather are asked to extreme of the human possibilities the conscious stop responsibility that is incumbent to me ask that it is made all the possible because in the morning tomorrow they flow unfailing reinforcements*". For the *Bari*, than it was found with the left canted in ahead in order tying itself to the Qarishta and Fratarit and with the right at Klisura the discourse was complex, however the issue more urgent was the stitches of the created passage on the southern slopes of the Qarishta and Fratarit. The employment of the battalion complements of the *Julia*, with the competition of units of the *Aquila* from north and *Bari* from south, did not succeed in attempt although three attempts. It could not succeed. It was be a matter of 600 men, not of a battalion of 600 soldiers. One is already inasmuch as a organic Bn very very rarely it succeeded in giving satisfactory results to its first immediate employment in combat. To greater reason temporary units, with insufficient organization, deprived of infantry-support weapons and of equipments, without training, in no way they could operate as a unit. Nevertheless it was made resorted even to such attempt, also in the knowledge of a illusory hope, in order to try to resolve a tactical situation, for which no shrewdness turned out more available.

The attack was repeated. Ancora once the complements left, officials in the leed. Once again the fire of the Greeks arrested inexorably the action. The breach between *Julia* and *Bari* remained, therefore as painfully it remained the impotence feeling in the mind of the men on the line. From the groups of mountain artillery they had been yielded to the alpine Bn. all the artillerymen alive for the service of the few still efficient pieces, had been yielded also the machine-guns for the near defense of the batteries. But it was not enough. On the 29th were decided to pass to the *Val Tagliamento* Bn. from the 8th to the 9th alpine in order to resume the action with new forces. Then, on solicitation of gen. Papagos, the Greek II

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Corps had also ordered the resumption of the offensive to start from the morning of the 30th with 15th and 1st the division. This time the Qarishta and Fratarit fell: after very violent preparation of artillery – a good eighty pieces, of which eight heavy ones - and mortars concentrated in the narrow zone held by the 9th alpine, the few defenders were swept up in a few hours by the Greek 28th and 33rd infantry. When the mass of the attacker, supported from the *hurrahs!* and from the bugle blasts, exceeded the advance defense was the ruin: from the passages opened the enemy gushed out as a continuous surge, going back the slope behind the uninterrupted fire of its artillery and its mortars. The Qarishta and Fratarit was overrun. Then it was the time of the Sevrarit, while the rests of the 9th alpine and the groups *Udine*, *Conegliano* and *Val Tanaro* were collected on the Topajanit, already half encircled. All the company and battalion commanders and nearly all the battery commanders had fallen at their posts, died or hurt. Finally limping gaspingly for the opposite slope, the *Val Tagliamento* arrived. It was only the head of the battalion with the commander, but the others, to groups, were arriving on the scene, straining itself in a run deprived of hope in order to arrive in time. The Topajanit was held and all for were worth all the exercises tried by the Greeks for two days of continuation ⁽⁷¹⁾.

More to the south the Greek 1st division succeeded to occupy the ridge of Varibodi - abandoned by the 41st infantry by now indefensible because after the fall of the Fratarit - and to attest itself of front to the buttress of Tolari. On 31 December the *Bari* assumed the new alignment on the line of the strong points (sketch n. 73), articulated in two fields respective placed under the responsibility of the 41st and the 140th infantry, but of decidedly heterogeneous composition. Not there is doubt that, for urgent that they were the circumstances that they induced to make resorted to abnormal provisions, the intermingling of the units had become unacceptable for the effects denied that gave birth to it. A table reported to the received divisional infantries from the 11th Army in the months of December and November is meaningful of as the units of the *binary* could operate, already of for if constituted explicitly in order to complete a *single tactical action*:

71) "Your memo - wrote Gen. Geloso to Gen. Bancale - *Absolute categorical imperative to maintain at to whatever cost balance possession entire node mounts of M, Topajanit & doubling to fine Klisura north Osum confluence (...) comprised, for welding between left Julia & right Pusteria*" (DS Commando 11th Army, tele 029304/op. date 30.12.1940).

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

	<i>Modena</i>	<i>Pusteria</i>	<i>Acqui</i>	<i>Cuneo</i>	<i>Brennero</i>
Osum valley		bulk			
Klisura	41 st Inf.		I/17 th Inf.	II/8 th Inf.	
Zagorias valley		<i>Belluno</i>			
Dhrinos valley	42 nd Inf.	<i>Balzano</i>			
Kurvelesh			18 th In.		bulk
Sushiça valley				I/8 th Inf..	
Shoreline			17 th Inf. (-)	7 th Inf.	

Soddu took part, but a greater firmness previously demonstrated would not have place in the present conditions:

"(...) for how much it renders me account of the urgent necessities that can sometimes be introduced that Command, I cannot approve of this system that does not have other result that that one to break up the framework of the units cancelling some the war efficiency and to increase the confusion in the ordering of the units. It is necessary to react to this tendency and to make every effort as I have already prescribed many times, in order to begin to put a little order in the chaos puts into effect them, than it is not last cause of the present military situation (...)" ⁽⁷²⁾.

To the end of December the "military present situation" was similar to that one much that had provoked the telephone call of Gen. Soddu to Gen. Guzzoni on 4 December. Or, at least, such it appeared to the eyes of the Comandante Superiore. However, the directives circulated from Gen. Geloso to the 11th Army consisted in a document that confirmed and emphasized the tasks of the army corps and the measures particular to put into effect along the front, however, very to study it, a single phrase - that one begins - was wide sufficient to condense the truth of the moment:

"In every activity of the Heads of whichever degree puts into effect the operating phase and of the troops he must answer in all its various aspects and the more absolute way to the categorical imperative" to last "; to last in waited for that the machine is ready for the counter-offensive that at the opportune moment will be delivered with decisive character, resolute, totalitarian (...)" ⁽⁷³⁾.

6. THE ASSUMPTION OF COMMAND BY GEN. CAVALLERO

At the opening of the crisis, on 4 December, Gen. Cavallero had been sent urgently to Albania. Returning to Rome in the afternoon of

⁷²⁾ DSCSFAA, f. 1137/0.M. dated 29.12.1940.

⁷³⁾ DS Commander 11th army, f. 029331/op. dated 30.12.1940.

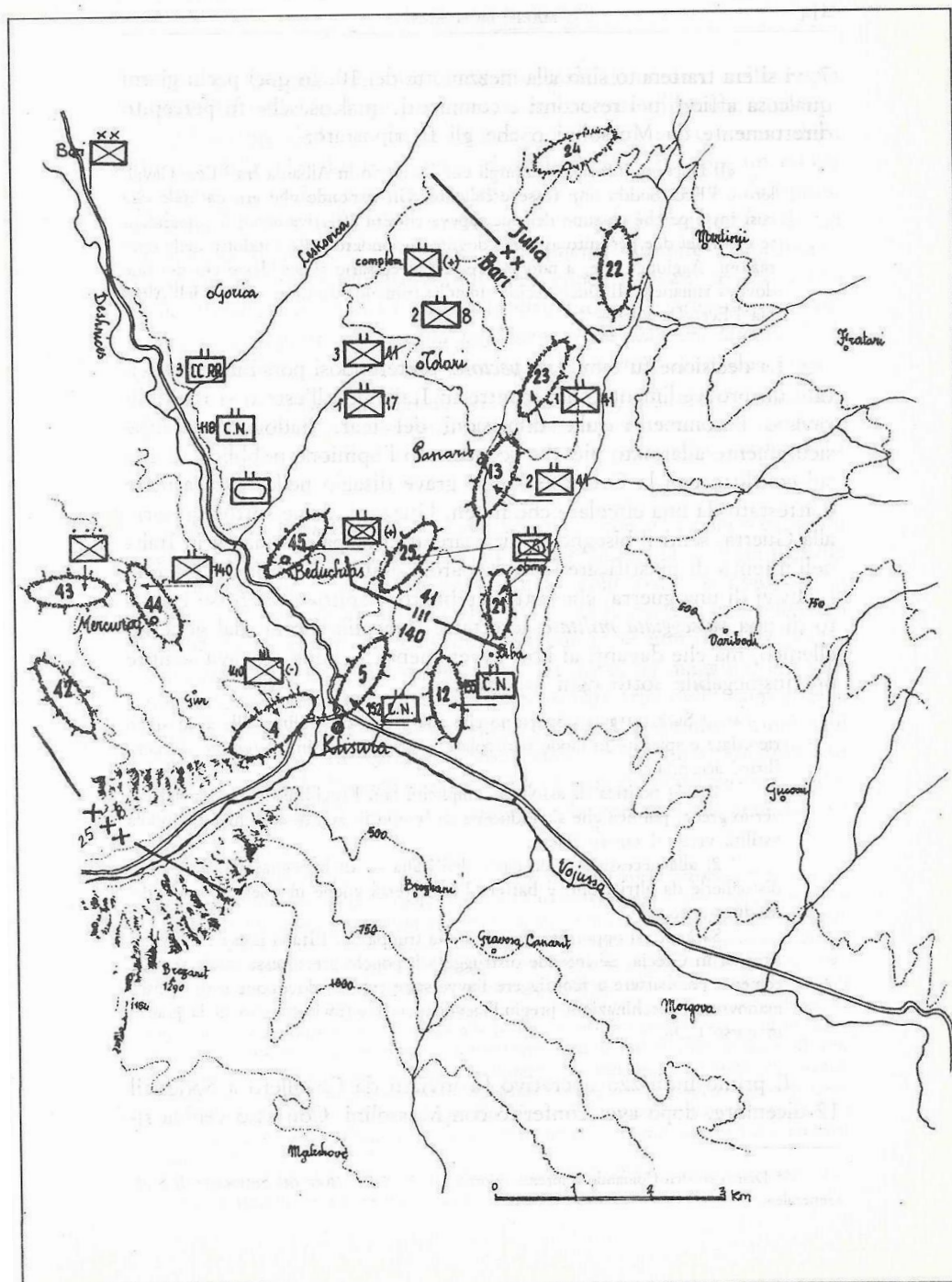
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 413

The Vojussa sector on 31 December

Schizzo n. 73

IL SETTORE DELLA VOJUSSA (31 DICEMBRE)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the 7th, you were withheld until to the midnight of the 10th. In those few days something emerged in the reports and comments, something that was perceived directly from Mussolini or that it was brought back to him:

"The Duce informs me the results that the agreement in Albania between his Exc. Cavallero and Exc. Soddu was not excellent. I answer that it was natural that therefore was because none of the two knew who was effectively the commander and who of the two therefore would have had to answer of the conduct of the operations. I add that, to my opinion, it was necessary decided who of the two had to remain. The Duce decides remains commander of the troops of Albania his Exc. Cavallero"⁽⁷⁴⁾.

The decision was held *in pectore*, preferring himself possibly to avoid a provision that, while in Italy and to the foreign country the comments were multiplied on the demission of Mar. Badoglio, would sure have alarmed more than abashed public opinion. And that on the conflict with Greece existed serious uneasiness in the Armed Forces both attested in a circular that Gen. Guzzoni, as undersecretary to the War, felt the need to circulate to the main Commands in Italy in the attempt to justify and the exact word - in some way the reasons of a war, than all of them would have "understood" if it had been be a matter of a accepted *military walk*, or more better endured, from the Greek government, but that in front of the noted events, everyone found more and more inexplicable under every aspect:

"(...) It will be however opportune that to the mass of the soldiers under arms they are remembered and explained in particular way the next and remote origins of the conflict, pointing out:

1) to politics of absolute complicity with England continuation from the Greek government, political who was translate for a long time in actions of continuous and underhanded hostility towards our Country;

2) to the necessity - from part of Italy - to engage English forces, withdrawn from other fronts and to strike England also in this area of the Mediterranean.

It will be also opportune to explain to the troop that Italy does not have territorial sights in Greece, means some to destroy the Greek people; it wants simply to fight and to defeat the *English* adversary, wherever it warped maneuvers and prejudicial machinations for the victorious outcome of the war in course (...)."

The first operating address was sent from Cavallero to Soddu on 12 December, after to have conferred with Mussolini. With it he demanded

74) Historical Diary Comando Supremo, dated 10.12.1940. "Notes of the General Chief petty officer of S.M."

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

a plan of winter operation to put into effect in the first decade of February 1941 for reoccupy the basin of Korça, moving from the sector of the 9th Army and eventually with the cooperation of the left of the 11th. The maneuver unpromising to stabilize new a front as much as economic as possible for being able, behind such shelter, to constitute the maximum of the reserves, and had to be realized from a group of mountain units, properly rested and reordered, to reach between those available ones for the indicated at that time held account of the divisions of previewed arrival. Moreover it was necessary to preview the formation of skiing units "*to employ for tactical maneuver*" ⁽⁷⁵⁾. To part the future, the contingent situation was anything but rose-colored:

"(...) we live to the day with the open nerves thesis and eyes. We are completing every effort, using every means, but the situation is always delicate (...). The disease of those our friend is not known and therefore it does not have repercussions " ⁽⁷⁶⁾.

To mid December the action of the Greeks - than did not know the disease of *those our friend* - was characterized from heading Tomorreces valley with Grarnshi objective; in the valleys Osum and Vojussa with Berat objective; in they of the Dhrinos and on the Kurvelesh with Valona objective. The continuous regressions, although in if not of serious capacity, became harmful adding itself. The greater threat was represented from the opposing progresses along the guiding lines of the Osum and the Vojussa for the danger of the separation of the two Armies. By now every ulterior land cession would have opened to the enemy possibility on objects of vital importance. Became therefore necessary not to yield more than a handful of land: this was the general conviction and

75) The issue of the units skiers which Gen. Cavallero had initially thought for an employment consisting in operating field – on the 12th had telephoned to Gen. Guzzoni asking within January four battalions voluntary skiers - then it was reorganized. The Armed forces high command Albania, in fact, considering that the atmosphere of the theater of operations badly was lend to the use of large units of the sort: much broken land, covered of calanque, wooded spots and, in kind, of topographical particular forbidden you to the use of the ski and in addition previewing a period of possible employment of the ski much short one because of the conditions of snow tied to the medium altitude and the latitude, had expressed the warning to use the skiers in duties of connection, refueling and in some surprise attack. Consequently, it had asked 22 skiers platoons, obviously completely equipped, manned and trained. Although that was prepared the splendid *Cervino* battalion, with two companies. Perhaps it was an error of tactical-organic character the losses would have been more numerous if the personnel were employed for platoons; for against the rendering he would have been sure advanced.

76) Cavallero diary, telephone call to Mussolini hours 09:15 of 13 December. The "our friend" was obviously the Italian deployment.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the first reason for which every unit it came as thrown in the furnace arrived.

Gen. Soddu tried to confer a priority to the programmed arrivals, but already Gen. Guzzoni had ordered to the G.S. of the Army to urgently send to Tirana an officer in order to establish the detailed agreements, while Gen. Ranza, commander of the Aeronautics of Albania, had begun the work in order to prepare seven new fields with the goal of a better distribution of the aerial units. The 18th Gen. Cavallero presided a meeting with Guzzoni, Roatta and his main collaborators, and Starace in order to see like reinforcing the more soon to Albanian theater:

"It was a matter of a front of 200 km - Cavallero synthesized - held by 160,000 men, of which 100,000 online. This front has light rear but it has not yielded because if it had yielded we would have reduced ourselves to the redoubts of Valona and Skumbi, that it has insufficient value like I seize tactical. This forehead, only fed from complements, has held until yesterday.

(...) the Duce with Guzzoni has established that the wall does not make that with counterattacks. The problem is to carry very soon into Albania four divisions (...)⁽⁷⁷⁾.

Of the four divisions, two - the *Brennero* and the *Cuneo* - had to leave first the others two - *Lupi di Toscana* and *Legnano*

- they had to follow. But that that in a few words clearly was established, to the practical action become more complex than a *puzzle*.

Before the cited divisions the permanence of a group of alpine was previewed airlift and therefore without artillery of draft animals. "*We will have two battalions soon by air, but we will not employ them at once. The rest will follow*" commented Cavallero. But unfortunately no one in Albania was still successful, under chasing of the events, not to use an unit before that it was complete. Reason for which it was from attending repeating itself of the serious disadvantage.

Then the problem of supply was placed urgent. "*If we continue therefore before ten days more is not eaten*" observed Roatta. To that Cavallero replied that the problem evidently had to be resolved, but that "*of four divisions two them are like the bread, without of which is not eaten*".

Moreover, at Bari 40,000 men and 12,000 draft animals found themselves waiting, plus the *Acqui* and *Cuneense*: it was necessary to send back in garrison

⁷⁷⁾ Cavallero Diary, date 18.12.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

as much as impossible one to embark to short expiration in order to avoid useless uneasiness to the personnel.

He was also indispensable to send army corps artilleries, possibly to Valona, but "at Valona it is difficult to disembark - Cavallero found bitterly - *because the air defense is deficient. We are succeeds in to say that it is better not to give more alarms!*".

The availability of the ships, calculated by the R. Navy for homogenous cargo, was following: for 17 steamboats for troops, 10 for draft animals, 9 for motor vehicles, 5 for fuels and 9 various materials. The transport of a complete division was not get exhausted in less than seven ordinary days and only the supplying of rations and ammunitions – not to be connected therefore from those extraordinary ones for the constitution of the supplies, practically nonexistent - was gone around on the 2,000 tons per day. Among other from Brindisi never did not exist difficulties in order to leave, while at Bari the opposite difficulties from the northeast wind were sensitive, a lot that the hospital ship " Gradisca " from various days attended of being able to enter in port and was quite in order to be diverted on Ancona. Gen. Guzzoni, that it had problems also for the Libya and the Aegean, asked which priority had to be attributed to the sector, declaring that to its way to see that Albanian was the more important. Gen. Cavallero, after a strange affirmation: "*and much probable one that the war will be fought and won in the Balkans*", agreed.

That same day Soddu spoke with Mussolini. Specific trace of the telephone conversation does not exist, but it seems that Soddu, in supplying the general lines of the situation - the two armies lacking in tactical contact; the 9th Army forced to abandon the head of Tomorreces and to bend its right; the 11th, already in series distresses for Klisura, posted to the unexpected front to the folding of the *Modena* on the Kurvelesh and above all to the yielding of the *Siena* with the consequent abandonment of Port Palermo - he has been shown extremely disturbance. In fact, the following morning at 08:30, when he telephoned Gen. Cavallero, these being saying: "*the Duce has said that to me that you have communicated*" and in an attached note to the reassumed one of the telephone call is specified that in said phrase "*imply that his Exc. Soddu has reported that the enemy has smashed in valleys Sushitza and Valona threat and that it does not have means in order to make headway this situation*". Cavallero informed Soddu of the program in performance course; it exhorted to widen with urgency and the how much more possible bridgehead of Klisura and concluded: "With the exposure that I have made the note Personality yesterday

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

it is content. Serene mind always. It wants to say double efficiency". Then but, addressing to Guzzoni and Roatta, present to the telephone call, he observed thoughtfully: "the enemy presses [in order to smash in] before that the reinforcements arrive. I preview that Geloso will have to support a new attack. Yesterday it has weight Port Palermo. It has given the commander of the field to Gen. Messe. We expect also an attack on Tepeleni".

Who lost the calm was Mussolini:

"In the meeting of 18:00 hours with the Duce, these express the opinion that, given the shown tragic situation from his Exc. Soddu, does not remain that to replace all in the hands of the Fuehrer because nothing more can we do. The train for his Exc. Ciano is already ready in order to go in Germany to confer with regard to it.

His Exc. Cavallero is opposed decidedly to this concept. It asserts that already it has decided to leave in the night and that it is felt to re-establish the situation. Dismissing his Exc. Cavallero, the Duce receives his Exc. Guzzoni and his Exc. Ciano. His Exc. Guzzoni communicates that the situation is improved and his Exc. Ciano, getting from knows it from the Duce, informs his Exc. Cavallero that is not more the case that it leaves: this is also the thought of the Duce.

The Etc. Cavallero asks newly for being received by the Duce and the confirmation that has decided to leave equally. The Duce agrees" ⁽⁷⁸⁾.

But morning after (20 December) Gen. Guzzoni wrote on the historical diary of the Comando Supremo:

"I have had a talk with the Germanic attaché von Rintelen, during which I have represented the necessity, in relation to the situation that has been determined in Albania and Libya, of a Germanic immediate participation that lightens to us".

Cavallero found at Tirana little trusting Soddu ⁽⁷⁹⁾, even if local actions on the Kurvelesh with the 18th infantry were being organized in order to re-establish the line to the south of Progonat, the head of the Sushica valley with the 2nd alpine and on the shoreline. However *"it thinks above all that it is not the moment to also think next to extreme measures being the situation much delicate one, for the fatigue of the troops and the Commanders. Soddu thinks that it convene to await results of the three counterattacks that will be able*

78) Cavallero Diary, date 19.12.1940.

79) It was as soon as arrived a message most urgent and alarming: *"I make ulterior possible present to be attended for arrival & employment noted troops shoreline zone stop situation division Siena is serious & the few troops available employed at crossroads obstruction shoreline & Sushiza valley does not much I do not say cannot tomorrow guarantee Valona against quick of the enemy advance it is indispensable stop within complete Valona arrival elements division Acqui & availability at alpine regiment Fieri to which I can supply baggage train & transported by pack animal artillery stop General Geloso"* (DS Comando 11th Army, tele n. 028488/op. dated 20.12.1940, hours 04:25.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

to improve the situation, sure not to get it worse"⁽⁸⁰⁾. In order to see the things more clearly, Cavallero then went to Fieri, to speak with Geloso, then visited the port and the airport of Valona and therefore return to Tirana and at 20:00 he telephoned Mussolini, who was, informed of the decided provisions, "*he recommends to choose the guide lines of attack well*". The more important point of the conversation was that "*it remains meant that no extreme decision will be taken in Rome before that the rendering of these attacks has been seen*". What still remained one to make: a report to Rogozhinë with the Comandante Superiore and the commanders of the Army (hours 22:30-24), whose outcomes were put in written for good norm of Soddu:

"I yesterday reassume the oral communications of the night talk at Rogozine, with the commanders of the two Armies 9th and 11th:

1) the period of crisis, during which the line of battle has been able to make assignment on the only unit online, is exceeded with the arrival of the new units sent from Italy;

2) the Duce orders therefore that steps without delay to the offensive, with precedence to the front of the 11th army, where the battle for Valona is being carried out. Scope of the time in this field: to take to space and breath so as to be able to attend the arrival of the other units preannounce from Italy;

3) method for both the armies: to attack for groups of battalions in the sensitive directions, without stopping, as forces available will be had, choosing weighted direction and succession of objects to you; attacks do not fall to you but it prepared organic; wherever it is a fresh force, thereby must be delivered the attack;

4) the two commanders of army, taken acquaintance of the program of arrival of the forces coming from Italy and of the plan of distribution of them to the armies in the measure and the time, have declared of having flood confidence in the happened one of this method, that they have always wished of being able to apply and that they offer themselves to put into effect integrally and without delay; they have added that the moral of the troops online, which feel the effects of great fatigue, immediately will be raised some;

5) both the commanders also have spontaneously assured that with the arrival of the *Brennero* and *Cuneo* divisions, and present estates the units already disembarked, will be able ahead to be made a good step in the substitution online of the more tried troops;

6) that the application of the norms dictated from the Duce, for the prizes and the necessary ones punishes, it will give results that if attends some.

I ask Your Excellence, to supervise because those norms rigidly are applied; that all the peripheral elements - until the platoon commanders, until to the non-commissioned officers and the troop - know that the deserving ones will be immediately and widely it rewards you, but that retreating it is treason and as such will be punished. And they know it:

80) Cavallero Diary, date 20.12.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

- than a single norm of combat exists: the attack;
 - than the infiltrations they are fought in any case counterattacking and holding firm on the place;
 - that no commander will be justified if he will have retreat before to a infiltration.
- I know well that all that corresponds to a conception that You and I have for a long time and that only the end means has lacked to us prevented here to realize.
- The Duce has said to us of having overflowing confidence in all of us; we will demonstrate that it has been well placed."

The letter evidently was turning more personal. First of all to Mussolini (to which it came transmitted in copy from the same Cavallero):

-*"The period of crisis (...) is exceeded with the arrival of the new units sent from Italy"*. For the G.U. commanders, which they interested only the troops in place, these were words, at least for the moment, but for Mussolini they meant tranquility;

-*"Il Duce orders therefore that steps without delay to the offensive..."*. Cavallero knew very well that such term was absolutely outside reported place if to three counterattacks premises with limits objectives, but he knew equally well that it would have further calmed Mussolini;

-*"The two army commanders (...) have declared to have a flood of confidence (...) and the moral of the troops online (...)will immediately be raised some"*, and that *"a good step in the substitution online of the tried troops will be able to be made more headway "*. All this demonstrated to unit of views and personal guarantee of the greater protagonists.

Also it was turned the army commanders, obviously for through of the Comandante Superiore, that he had the duty to make his own directives. For they existed an implicit admission of the difficulties in which they were debated: *"to attack with groups of battalions"* (it was not possible to speak about divisions, the small and to light binary divisions, able of a single tactical action!); an admonition: *"no commander will be justified if he will have retreat before to a infiltration"*, and an employment address: *"the infiltrations are fought in any case counterattacking and holding firm on the place"*. The indication of a single norm of combat, the attack, was proclamation perhaps for personal conviction, also in order to perhaps to please Mussolini; however in the insides of the armys for the moment every effort much was more concretely turned to an activity that provoked the spirit of aggressiveness in the men, first element for any attack.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

For Soddu finally there was a veil - but not too much - accusation of deficiency in the action of command. At the bottom, in all the letter exists a single point of tightened competence of the General head of S.M., as such: "*the Duce orders therefore that steps without delay to the offensive...*". All remaining belonged to the sphere of normal relevance of the commander of the army group. The true reason of *that* meeting of Rrogozhine was in the knowledge - exact or wrong that was - from part of Cavallero of having to give to the main commanders, and through them to the divisional, the confidence injection that Soddu could not more debit. From then Cavallero who remained in Albania. Mussolini was strongly displeased of the course of the operations. It had prepared a telegram for Cavallero, but he did not send it at once "*in the hope that the events the rendered it useless*". Instead after a week he sent it:

"That that follows is how much I task of the determined situation in Albania. Such situation is reassumed in synthesis in these words: for 50 days by now the Italian army endures passively tactical and strategic initiative of the enemy. Having exhausted ours beginning offensive impulse, the enemy has begun to exercise his pressure on us, rejecting in first phase to the old border. Since the pressure continued also into Albanian territory, was decided the withdrawn from Corizza and Argirocastro and therefore was given two names to the Greek victory. The withdraw on the Kamia and Klisura was decided based on these considerations: a) interposing space between us and the enemy; b) to make time in order to make to flow the reinforcements from Italy; c) to nearly occupy positions that the nature has made impregnable or; d) and above all in the hope, end here in vain, to see - especially in the winter - to slow itself down or to get the enemy initiative exhausted, event that would have had to coincide with the reordering, strengthening of our units and therefore with a resumption of their ability to resistance and active reaction. Completing a effort that can say exceptional in this period of time, they are arrived in Albania from 120 to 140 thousand men, that is, more or less complete, the forces of seven divisions, but I do not see trace some of that "wall" that would have had to rise as first favorable consequence from the withdrawal, but perhaps and up to now to the extreme left of the Vercellino army. As soon as arrived on the new positions, the Greeks have immediately followed us close behind. The effectiveness of reinforces has not been felt in decisive way and consequently we have continued to lose day by day land in a especially unstoppable chronic worsening and with unavoidably losing material and men, than while it depresses ours it exalts the moral of the enemy, whose strategic objective is by now clear: to expel to us from southern and central Albania.

To every regression, folding, inflection, infiltration - superfluous euphemism that badly they hide the truth of the things - came announced an action and a counterattack in order to re-establish the situation. This restoration

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

is not ever happened and sometimes the news of the result of our reaction has not been given even, while the enemy..."⁽⁸¹⁾

The appraisal made from the operations section of the Comando Superiore on the date of 21 December was the following. The adversary essentially possessed the initiative in virtue of a organizational superiority. His advance, in fact, not as well as because more strong, more audacious or better armed, as much as because he fought with organic units, where all worked better. The Italian troops, instead, acted with not organic groupings and in that weakness was fundamental. The operating guide lines were three: the Skumbini, the Vojussa and the shoreline. The first represented the conquest of Elbasan, the separation of southern Albania from that northerner, the spreading in the districts more treacherous for the Italians; the second one meant the conquest of Berat, the occupation of the oil wells of Devoli, the separation of the two armies; third it meant Valona, that is Great Britain in the Adriatic. If under the profile of the land operations the director of the Vojussa were that preferable, in strategic the total vision the director of the shoreline prevailed itself clearly. Action derives some that accentuation of the enemy effort along the shoreline was from presuming, with the action along the Vojussa.

The more suitable system in order to arrest the adversary was that one of set against major unit organic and fresh, that is free from the set that up to now had been cause before the Italian failures. The experience of a month and means decidedly carried to exclude that splitting up of the divisions and plugging made with battalions and inserted groups it was possible to balance the fight. But in order to transport and to disembark such unit time was necessary. The gain of such time was obtainable resisting in place or retreating. otherwise, retreating the land did not allow more continuous a defensive systems, but it carried to orient itself to single obstructions of the guide line. In conclusion, the divisions in arrival did not have more absolutely to be employed for shares and lacking in means in order to feed the resistance in place; for against it was necessary to re-unite them in correspondence of the main lines of facilitation. While such collection of unit had place, it could

81) The text is signed and remained in suspended. The following 24 December with ticket was transmitted: "*Beloved Cavallero, enclosed is this t/n telegram that you had to be sent the 17th current. I have delayed in the hope that the events rendered it useless. I send it. It considers you as adding to the telegram with which I order you to defend to the end the Tepeleni-Klisura bastion. Mussolini*".

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to happen that the line current of resistance, and in such eventuality the new divisions under way they would have been of one by one to the more delicate fields, in order to vibrate a blow to the adversary and, subsequently, to unblock the alignment and to begin noted *regeneration*. Or that the line yielded, and in such case the units in place would have withdrawn on the obstructions, while those arriving would have been used in order to counteroffensive in opportune direction.

On this base and holding present the directives realized in the meeting the evening of 20th of Rrogozhine of, Soddu circulated the guidelines which the commanders of armies had to inform their operating activity. In the succeeding days Cavallero had a series of personal contacts with Gens. Nasci, Arisio, Messe, Bancale. Objective, the position of Soddu was made more and more difficult, since the undeniable alacrity of the General head of G.S. had not only moved the waters to Rome, that it was its task, but also impress a abrupt accelerated to the logistic organization of territorial campaign and in Albania, that is in the within of the responsibilities of the Comandante Superiore. The meaning of an interference of the sort was clear and it could not but to hurt Soddu, who had replaced Visconti Prasca with the own intention to make what it was making now Cavallero. But perhaps worse it derived from the talks of the General head of the G.S. with the commanders of high degree, in the course of which emerged unavoidably the will directive of the true commander of the troops in Albania. Between the two frictions did not rise, essentially because Soddu, in consideration of the course of the battle, was not so much strongly felt to ask the respect for his own prerogatives or to place the confidence issue. But in private he would have manifested bitterness and I proposed the removal and in a few days would have addressed for the last time to Col. Sorice, in a long vent. While the Greeks attacked newly. The morning of the 24th Cavallero telephoned Palazzo Venezia giving good news for Qarishta and Fratarit and optimistic forecasts for the Sushica valley and Klisura. But Mussolini, lively moved for the information that reached to it, sent two vehement telegrams:

"According to a report of Arm the route of the *Siena* - I say be a pain because therefore it is - has been provoked from the usual infiltration of a few Greek patrols stop the result has been the continuation occupation of Chimara from the order of hang on for three days by the Greeks stop This does not make but to give to new food to the moral of the people and the Greek army stop You send a report to me on how much is happened on the development of the episode and on the provisions you adopted

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

punished and organizational More and more urgent stop to you the necessity is revealed to turn over a situation that is by now of nearly exclusively moral character "⁽⁸²⁾,

and

"Any thing happens orders you to resist to the end on the bastion Progonat – Tepeleni - Klisura even if tomorrow personally thinks completely being encircled stop You of integral the intelligent execution of this order stop responsible Confirmed " ⁽⁸³⁾.

To first of them, Cavallero replied in the evening, reorganizing the facts, explaining the error of a regiment commander in the occupation of a position on which it had to take contact with the lateral unit, error that had provoked the withdraw because of the tactical impossibility to hold the new line, and specifying that, however, it was in course an inquiry, on the base of whose outcomes would have been decided for the provisions to burden of the responsibilities. He added also: "*Under my personal responsibility I say to you that the moral complete change has already happened on all the forehead*". The second to telegram it was limited to answer: "*Acknowledged*". Often, after to have spoken with Mussolini, Ciano called. He made also this time:

It is in course all the system in order to perhaps act between a pair of days. The situation is as before: attacks rejected on the front of the *Julia* and elsewhere. Everywhere we react. We have exceeded the apex of the crisis; in some points we have not still made the wall but I am calm. You can be sure that we march with the deep conviction that the crisis is exceeded. The complete change from the point of view of the men is total" ⁽⁸⁴⁾.

It is comprehensible that Cavallero emphasized its natural optimism, both in order to make to rely to Soddu and in order to avoid excessive reactions outside and however place in the political atmosphere. The 26th came to say that Mussolini reached to express his disappointment because a hill had been lost and because from the fact it had been informed from other sources:

"Not, Duce, draft perhaps of the hill 879, advanced line - Cavallero reassured - is not nothing, a lot that I had not given importance to you. The enemy

82) DSCS, tele 4936/op. dated 24.12.1940, hours 13:18.

83) Ibid, tele 4937/op. dated 24.12.1940, hours 13:20. On the form of the message every comment is superfluous.

84) Cavallero Diary, date 24.12.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

attacks everywhere, in order to perhaps take advantage of the last days of our crisis (...).
I'm displeased of the relative omission to hill 879, but I had not given importance to it.
Be sure that we do not hide anything from you"⁽⁸⁵⁾.

The moment, as already it has been placed in evidence, was not easy and the ugly news from one or the other part of the front was the following or quite were they interlaced. To dark Gen. Geloso informed that the battalions *Feltre* and *Cadore* had yielded in Osum valley bending the line, already damaged the previous day. Immediately Cavallero arranged the transport of a alpine Bn., then telephoned to Rome. Mussolini then ordered to pass the responsibility of the defense of Osum valley to the 9th Army because, to his judgment, the 11th Army attention could not be divided in two. The issue was examined by Cavallero and Soddu, that they agreed on the Inappropriateness to bind together tactically the Tomorreces and Osum valleys, inasmuch as this last one made system, under the defensive profile, with the Vojussa – Deshnices valley, convergent both on the Berat. About the achieved convenience that the fields of the Osum and Klisura remained subordinates to an only authority, also in relation to the characteristics of the ridge of Mali Qarishta, from which it was possible to maneuver between the two guide lines. , Cavallero after all determined to assign the *Brennero* opportunely to the Osum sector, in addition to the *Pusteria*, constituting with said divisions a new army corps (the IV) to the dependencies of the 11th Army. Then he brought back his attention to the extreme right: the problem more urgent remained those than to give to breath to the base of Valona, restoring the ancient line of Palermo Port. The offensive, succeeding, would have provoked a lightening also on the front of Tepeleni, but necessary condition for being able to carry it out was the support of the weak points to the left wing of to army, is worth to say Klisura and Osum valleys.

For Klisura two battalions of the 8th infantry *Cuneo* were available, that they came of course assigned to the VIII Corps at Berat; for the second one the *Val Pescara* alpine Bn. was usable. The *Brennero* had to be concentrated at Elbasan, with a regiment at Berat, for the moment in reserve. As far as the offensive in the sector of Valona, it could be counted on the *Cuneo* less the two battalions of the 8th ⁽⁸⁶⁾. Soon after, but, another message of Mussolini, sent in the afternoon arrived:

85) Cavallero Diary, date 26.12.1940.

86) With an unusual procedure, of these directives a true one was spread and own memo signed from both, generals.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

To continuation of today's telephone communication obvious *stop* It is that enemy has two objectives of strategic character *stop* One to the center in order to divide two armies & to try to go around them *stop* one to our right & this prompt particularly English desire in order to occupy Valona *stop* It is easy to suppose that what would mean in all the fields the loss of Valona *stop* an English contribution also in men is not to be excluded *stop* Now your directives seems to me adapted to the situation & that is to strengthen the center in order to demolish whichever enemy attempt & to give breath at Valona, that is to remove the enemy threat *stop* Better way in order to reach this last essential goal consists in taking, leaning at fortified strong point of men means &, the initiative of operations & pushing it more to possible in depth *stop* By now much too long duration of enemy initiative cannot be arrested in other way *stop* Reconsidered if the located forces at disposition of Messe are sufficient & from the point of view of number & from that one of their composition & hold account conditions of weather even if that means to delay somewhat *stop* Said General Messe the account on him *stop*.

I reorder old divisions that I consider of fundamental importance can gradually be applied to begin from the 9th Army that given the season the will have at least for two months a sure tranquility *stop* Optimal all say concrete providence that they hold concrete high the moral of the troops, which moral south will be raised not hardly of blow from north & it will come known from the troops that the direction of the changed east wind and that one first binging it is be inflicted on the Greeks *stop* Mussolini ⁽⁸⁷⁾.

In those days the communications of varied type with Mussolini probably reached the intensity apex. The morning of the 27th, after new explanations to Rome, they came circulated directive n. 788, with which in particular the *Pusteria* was foreshadowed that the *Brennero* was destined to re-establish as soon as possible the occupation in the Osum valley to mount of Çerevode, climb over. Moreover Gen. Geloso had to predispose the near defense of Valona as the extreme guarantee against eventual depreciable unfavorable cases, on the positions: Vojussa from mouth to Dorza - Maia Tartarit - Brataj - mounts of Brataj - Passo Logora. For the first outline of such defense existed the *Siena*, that it had to be withdrawn from the line and to be reordered, the positional machine-gun companies and the batteries of the Guard to the frontier in place. In this precise definition Mussolini it thought of having to still join the conversation:

"Between little the *Brennero* and the *Cuneo* they will be to the complete in Albania. Following immediately the other two & will still a third division. Then it will have to think next to supply and to reorder integral of the divisions of the first and second to time. The divisions of which I speak in the present telegram not

87) DSCS, tele 4975/op. dated 26.12.1940. - hours 16:35.

88) DSCSFAA, f. 3263/op. dated 27.12.1940.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

they will have to be in some measure and for no reason broken up, but they will have to be left exclusively intact, obvious integral and dislocated employees towards the by now guiding enemy attack. The famous wall is made creating a second formation and one maneuver mass. That does not have therefore to be repeated that for fatality of things is happened with the *Cuneense* and *Acqui*, where has not been respected not even the regimental unit. Greek spokesperson say one of the reasons of their successes found in the breaking up of our Major unit. They are sure that you share in full load these my obvious affirmations and directives".⁽⁸⁹⁾

Effectively was a matter of obvious affirmations and directives. In the meantime the SIM signaled an intense naval activity carried out by the enemy approximately assumed the next sea and air offensive against the Italian coasts and the transport of British troops destined to Gianina and to Santi Quaranta for feeding the offensive on Valona, and emphasized the imminent Greek attempt to sweep up the 11th Army: "*obvious Greek intention to employ all forces available embezzling everywhere possible*". But the crisis of the day now was taken place on the Kurvelesh, where the *Modena* stood miraculously. It derived some from Soddu part, of agreement with Cavallero, the decision to divert the *Brennero* to the XXV Army Corps for to the field with Tepeleni, delaying the constitution of a new Corps in the valley of the Osum. And another determination was maturing in the mind of Soddu of front to a picture, to its eyes, almost frightening:

"(...) our line - he wrote wounded deeply to Col. Sorice is held still today from troops whose ability to reaction is very insufficient. From weeks, some for months, await the change - always promised - that never reaches. The recent ones counterattack have removed to the regiments, in some fields, those of little efficiency that still possessed, so that it is kept just with the teeth, as long as the Greeks do not attack of again. Of the front to nourished a little attack we can be smashes in whichever point. In Albania there are more than 200,000 men⁽⁹⁰⁾, but no unit, made exception of those already organizes on the place since the principle, sees *Ferrara* and *Julia* that still they are struck for their tradition. More units do not exist. The new commander of the 3rd grenadiers has written yesterday: the regiment is constituted - from 100 stunned men. The same Girotti and De Cia have written me. My eyes have controlled and stated.

This state of what determines phenomena of true panic (*Bari, Taro, Siena*). The lack of mules at the time that yes, lessened retreat, lets behind

89) DSCS, tele 5033/op./1 dated 28.12.1940.

90) On 28 December turned out to the office situation of the Comando Superiore given following approximated: Italian troops 245,000 men, of which approximately 130,000 to the 11th Army and 77,000 to the 9th Army; Albanians 8,000; civil laborers 25,000; draft animals 28,000; motor vehicles 8,500 and motorcycles 3,000.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

materials, automatic arms and guns. The continuous one to precipitate itself down here of "witness" of divisions, let alone the trouble of the "binary" has made yes that Albania is full of Commands, for more without means than operation, and of services, that they block the rears and they complicate the problem of the supply, without that online exists adapted number of combatants: until, it is said between parenthesis, I will propose shortly that, without to send new major unit to me, a third regiment for division is sent to me.

The center of the alignment is in period: and in danger they are Klisura, Tepeleni. The 9th army resist because it is not attacked. The attack of Valona finished as "ridiculus mus", theoretical vision that is of who judges from Rome. The attack would have to be carried out by the following forces:

- 1) 2nd alpine regiment, without unit equipment, baggage train, artillery (the regiment has attacked the 26 and the 27 and has lost a third of its efficiency, having become a instrument hardly able to defend itself);
- 2) two Bns. of the *Acqui*, of which one already it has fought and it been hardly tried;
- 3) three cc.nn. Bns to the which Galbiati it is teaching the launch of the bombs.

The necessity derives some to employ also the *Cuneo*, which has already two Bns at Klisura, it is without baggage train and artillery. Then the mules of *Acqui* and the artillery of the *Trieste* have taken themselves for the *Cuneo*. Messe do not have a commander: they have been given means of Bancale in arrival at Valona. How can an attack succeed in these conditions? We at least ten days would want in order to organize it but, in ten days, we will be subject to the enemy will. With the arrival of *Acqui*, of the *Brennero*, *Cuneo*, *Cuneense*, I meant to place a *stop* to the employment little by little, and to begin to relieve online. In this I was faithful to the first directive "to make wall" in order to begin to reorganize. Instead it is intentional to change direction, in order to counterattack everywhere, but it has been necessary to attack with patchwork units, just arrived from Italy. Result: the troops online are exhausted; those that counterattacks wear away before being complete. The change has not happened and the line is remained a veil. But now more urgent anchor rises a problem that is also most urgent one of the change online: we are at the eve of a new and more ponderosa effort on Klisura, Tepeleni, Valona. If the English troops disembarked to Prevesa will allow. If worn out I in counterattack the few fresh forces that I have, who will resist then to the new collision?

Concluding: tomorrow I will return to Valona, I will push myself beyond the pass of Logora, and will control *de visu* as the action has been organized. If I will not convinced that good probabilities of resolution exist, to my return I will take definitively position. Up to now I have not taken position because I know that Cavallero acts based on directives received from the Duce; but when he is himself on the point to arrange a trouble of this kind, I must speak clearly. I will say therefore that I do not feel myself to resist the command of Army group on the base with puts into effect the directives; and that because the directives the damage the others, but the orders I to them must give. I will say that it cannot be in charge in four. I will add that, since they are a soldier and I do not want any to go in the moment of the danger, gives a command to me of Army, in Albania, to the dependency of the new Armed artillery battalion commander of (...).

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The action of Valona is a theoretically optimal decision, but the attacks work organized, because if lead to the recklessness can be collected bitter yield. To attack yes, but when one is in a position to attacking and not playing hazard. I today enclose to you relation on the situation of Geloso (...) ⁽⁹¹⁾.

It is not possible to avoid a serious comment, exactly rich of truth, is true, but also much elusive of headway to precise personal liabilities. And also much miser of memories just on the main points in whose comparisons came taken the distances. In any case the issue of Gen. Soddu was still resolved before how much did not think the interested, because the arrived next day two telegrams of Mussolini on the subject:

- to Gen. Soddu: "*You come to Rome in order to confer*" ⁽⁹²⁾;

- to Gen. Cavallero: "*I have been called to Rome in order to confer with Gen.*

Soddu. During my absence you will assume the command of the Army group Albania" ⁽⁹³⁾.

It is from thinking that Gen. Cavallero knew very well that the provision was definitive. First of all because formally he was inconceivable that the General head of G.S. assumed just in and on advanced order the temporary substitution of a dependent, convened at Rome for a simple talk whose duration could not reasonably exceed 24 hours, then because by now the provision was *in air* ⁽⁹⁴⁾. Cavallero announced at once a meeting for 22:00 hours at Rrogozhine. Also still not having assumed officially the assignment, the relationship to the army commanders constituted the first action of command of the new head. "The convention, that for the importance chapter of the issues dealt and for the extreme delicacy of the military situation of the moment represents a mill stone on the road of the resistance, it has been in some points truly dramatic for appearing the contemporary insolubility of the two problems tactical and logistic over it remembered and for rude but the serene frankness with which - from part

91) DSCSFAA, letter to Col. Sorice dated 28.12.1940.

92) DSCS, tele 5049/op. dated 29.12.1940, hours 13:30.

93) DSCS, tele 5050/op. dated 29.12.1940, 13:30 hours.

94) However Cavallero wrote in his diary in date 29 December: "*In the afternoon I receive the order to take directly the command of the Armed Forces in Albania...*" and the 30 began the telephone call early (hours 9,30) with Mussolini with these words: "I assume the definitive command and thank you of the confidence...". Finally, the communication sent to the subordinate Commanders is formulated in the same sense: "*1156/OM stop For supreme order I have assumed from the eight hours today command of the Armed Forces of Albania*".

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

of all - the most serious situation comes examined in real light"⁽⁹⁵⁾.

The 30th was still heavy. The news was followed hurting: the XXVI Corps withdrew in the Tomorreces valley, the XXV had series difficulty on the plateau of the Kurvelesh, the special army corps did not succeed to take impulse on the shoreline. Worse of all, in the early afternoon the VIII Corps communicated that Qarishta and Fratarit were lost. While the Aeronautical Command Albania sent all the aircraft available, Gen. Roatta from Rome assured that in the night the *Lupi di Toscana* would have left and that for 1 January the boarding was arranged of the *Legnano*. At 17:35 was introduced at Tirana Gen. Mercalli, to which Cavallero specified that the commander of the nucleus - more than "nucleus" not could speak, unfortunately - of maneuver entrusted it that meant to constitute immediately in the zone of Berat in order to adorn further the probable Greek efforts. The evening informed Ciano: "*Today less good day of others (...)*"⁽⁹⁶⁾, but had confidence and the last day of the year sent to Mussolini a famous programmatic:

"I finally see the possibility to carry out on the front of Valona an action in forces in order to give breath to the base and to turn the situation to our advantage.

Concept: effort fed in depth; competition of the sector of Tepeleni (div. *Brennero*); in favorable case, threat towards the crossroads of Argirocastro;

Forces and means: those already predisposed according to the preparation already made, by now insufficient to the goal, but able to frame ready the new forces and the new means of which we can now to decide.

Given: urgent. I cannot now to establish it, but I would want was immediate after the disembarkation of the two regiments of the *Legnano*, that I have asked can be disembarked at Valona, with division command and part baggage train, before 3 January. This necessity is just absolute and is necessary that the General Staff with the Navy resolves this problem of speed. While I will have this evening an encounter with General Geloso in order better to define the essential data of the operation (...).

There will be pleasing, Duce, if you want to give me Your approval of principle to this program, with your observations"⁽⁹⁷⁾

Nearly at the same time from Rome was sent a meaningful message:

95) Cavallero Diary, date 29.12.1940.

96) Cavallero Diary, date 30.12.1940.

97) DSCSFAA, f. 200/A dated 31.12.1940.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

"Ambient German soldiers and politicians follow with emphasizing interest our Albanian vicissitudes. They place which bay condition participation that the line puts into effect is maintained them at all costs. Take and makes of it to take acquaintance to all"⁽⁹⁸⁾.

In the picture of the contacts for the shipment of German armored forces to Libya and of the cession of war materials - 30 December had been sent to Berlin a Italian mission, headed by General Favagrossa - Gen. Marras had informed the Comando Supremo who:

"(...) circa the offer a German division mountain for Albania I think necessary to consider that its presence would give guarantee that in difficult case situation in Albania German forces will take part timely through Bulgaria. According to idea of the German OKW division would have to arrive as soon as possible to operating German forces on Salonicco.

Other present part is kept that it is the tendency to subordinate the shipment mountain division to Albania also the employment of the mountain division *Taurinense*"⁽⁹⁹⁾.

To that Mussolini had made to answer to orient the talks in the sense to ask that the German mountain division was endured prepared for Albania destination; to insist on the necessity that the German pressure to the Greek frontier came emphasized and that the offensive action was anticipated as much as possible, also in order not to leave too much time the English participation and to remember that in Albania already four of the five Italian mountain divisions are found, beyond to two Valle groupings, and that had been arranged the shipment of two battalions of the *Taurinense*. But, as it will be seen, the developments of the agreements carried to different solution.

98) DSCS, tele 5078/op. dated 31.12.1940, hours 13:30.

99) DSCS, tele 2578/A dated 30.12.1940, of Gen. Marras.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Chapter IX

THE BATTLE OF BERAT
(January 1941)

1. THE STRATEGIC PROBLEM IN JANUARY 1941.

The evening of 31 December Cavallero had a new talk with Geloso in order to try to shake the weight of a series of events that seem unstoppable. The head of the Sushica in Greek hand; the defense of the plateau of the Kurvelesh in conditions of unstable equilibrium; the indefensible situation of Valona: one was prevailed counter-offensive in order to lighten Valona and to at least turn over the state of the things between the Dhrinos and the sea. According to Cavallero the effort in a single direction did not give sufficient guarantees of resolution. It was necessary to take advantage of two concurrent guide lines, understood to reach the hill of Golemi (with the *Brennero*) and Q. Drass (with coming from forces from the Sushica valley). The operation had to be developed methodically, consolidating every progress in order to reduce the lessened risk, and to be fed in depth. As far as the beginning date the opportunity to act was certain more soon possible; it could be begun the 4th the attack to Golemi and the 5th that one in Sushica valley, however Geloso had to deepen the issue. According to argument he was faced and of equal importance: the immediate constitution of a mass of maneuver near Berat in order to control the outlets from Tomorreces valley, Gsum and Vojussa, framed in the new IV Army Corps (Gen. Mercalli) and formed from the *Lupi di Toscana* in arrival without the artillery regiment, of the reconstituted *Siena* for the moment represented by the 30th infantry, the 21st Trieste artillery, from one carabinieri Bn. and two sqd. groups of cavalry. It was on such basis that Cavallero

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

he circulated the directive n. 8, with which he prescribed to the 11th Army the single interest - the elements fundamental with the maneuver:

- two convergent efforts of army corps;
- line to reach: P.to Palermo-Q. Drass - Golemi;
- guiding: valley Sushica for the special Corps and Salarije - Golemi

for the XXV Corps;

- assigned forces, beyond to those already available in the area: the *Legnano* and the *Brennero*,

and indicated the necessity of a careful caution in the comparisons of the origins from the field of Tepeleni, that could have put in serious difficulty the alignment of the army⁽¹⁾. Then he telephoned Mussolini, to which, in commenting the item of daily news, specified:

"Of disagreeable hour there is the loss of Ciafa Kulmakes, to the left extreme of the *Pusteria*, where leans the Tomori. He is not what that has particular gravity, but is disagreeable because it go around more easy renders the left extreme of division (...)" ⁽²⁾

and endured after the reassuring letter sent. For his part Mussolini answered immediately:

"Beloved Cavallero:

Before the fixed day by You for the action summon all the commanders of C.d' A and of division that will be engaged and they communicated the follow:

- a) the decision to attack can and must above all turn over the situation from the moral point of view. After 60 days of being the anvil it is to become the hammer;
- b) this action, that it will have to be begun and to be lead with extreme energy, must eliminate every reason of world-wide speculation on the Italian military prestige of which prestige has been, they are and will be most jealous defended;
- c) Germany is ready to send a mountain division to us in Albania, while it prepares an army destined to attack - in March - Greece from Bulgaria. My desire, my certainty is that thanks to your engagement and the value of the troops the direct aid of the Germany becomes superfluous on the Albanian front;
- d) The Italian people wait with anxiety that "the wind changes of direction".

Nothing other to add, if not this: to the eve of the action You will carry yourselves to the front in the more suitable place in order to follow it and you will remain yourselves until to concluded action. The battles of modern armies are much too complex because from far away they can be directed.

Account on Your and on all".

For the planned counter-offensive one agreed to obtain a mighty cooperation from part of the aviation both of Albania is and of the IV Aerial Zone

1) DSCSFAA, f. ala/op. dated 1.1.1941.

2) Cavallero Diary, dated 1.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

and with regard to Gen. Geloso was invited to take direct contact with Gen. Ranza. The land and air cooperation had already repeatedly revealed deficiencies of varied kind and it was to the search of a system able to conciliate requirements and possibility, where and when necessary. The Aviation Commander of Albania exposed therefore his considerations in purpose, signaling that extended of the critical circumstances in which poured the front rendered a various guideline in the dosage of the air supports in tactical field urgent. To the criterion of the sacrifice, or of all for all, also to achieve moral material effects and especially in support to situations more or less compromised, a more economic and more profitable criterion had to replace on the general and particular plan. *"Otherwise we would set off ineluctably towards a most serious crisis of exhaustion of the material and the personnel, both as it is known extremely precious, of difficult substitution, and unfortunately by now insufficient"*. The procedure through which it was reached the performance of the air support not was demonstrated profitable, in as much as the objectives, of principle numerous, came established near the Commanders of G.U. after a hurried and insufficient examination; the demands came generally forwarded to the aviation Commander with advance warning of time of average day; their character denoted that they nearly left *"exclusively from desire to achieve a moral effect (especially in the comparisons of our troops) or however directly verify effects from our lines"*. Evidently the participations therefore elaborated carried to a worrisome disproportion between achieved effect and waste of means

"(...) the advising of the officials of A.A. near the Army Commanders is not held in consideration - Ranza emphasized - Is necessary instead that each explain his own attributions with recognized competence and faculty of decision. The relative determination to air support demand a specific competence that lacks therefore completely near the land Commands. Such determination cannot be devolve that to officials of the A.A., even if apparently dealing sometimes of simple issues. But exactly in such simplicity it is hidden I invite to the superficiality, highly deleterious in any operating argument. With equal superficiality and with an official of the A.A. not specifically prepared equally pernicious results could be induced to judge land situations or to emit unjust or inopportune critics. Also the official observatories or ex-observatories have generally too much insufficient technical cognitions on the employment of the air weapon in order to deserve excessive confidence in such matter. All that drift most insufficient harmony between the two Armed Forces, aerial skepticism from part of the land Commanders, bitterness from part of the Commanders and units, that they see badly appreciates their efforts and, above all, badly uses their means (...)"

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Practical disadvantages and psychological uneasiness of which already it has been said in precedence, therefore as have been pointed out to the proposed advance of Gen. Geloso, just in this period, in order to resolve the situation radically: to assign the tactical air forces directly to the army. From part of the aviation Commander they were shown as three provisions profits. First, elimination of objectives little consisting, much too small or scattered, or not however susceptible of sure material effect. Every army Commander, with the advising of the official of aviation at his disposition, had to determine objectives to him not more (of principle than one or two per operating day) to strike with aviation, studying some the importance to the general ends of own the sector. According to, review of the standard continuation near the Army Commanders, making yes that the demands for participation only start with the explicit to seem favorable of the aeronautics officials. Third party, restitution of all its importance to the employment of aviation in strategic field ⁽³⁾.

Gen. Ranza had also other reasons of worry. It was consisting in fact that more than once the aircraft of the IV Zone they had found insurmountable obstacle in the adverse atmospheric conditions on the Adriatic, while in Albania, especially in the central sectors, such conditions was favorable. Evidently, repeating such disadvantage in the course of the counter-offensive under study, the availabilities of aircraft would have reduced to some thirty of S. 79 apparatuses efficient of the 36 of the 46th stormo; clearly inadequate force for the task, much more than in every case the action would have been protracted for several days. Consequently, Ranza requested - the question came forwarded directly to the S.M.R.A. and supported from two memorandum of Cavallero, one to Mussolini and one to Gen. Pricolo - the substitution of the aircraft of the 30th stormo with thirty new apparatuses (being remained efficient hardly seven airplane and for more antiquated, ancient and even dangerous), leaving in place the practical by now of the theater and trained personnel because. Also for the recognition squadrons (three existing) it was necessary to reinforce, so as to reach to one availability of one squadron per army corps. The answer of Mussolini, evidently on motivations of Pricolo, was not very positive. Indeed, it was negative for manner and of remark for another:

3) Memoranda introduced from the Aeronautical Commander Albania to Gen. Cavallero just as soon as assumed command.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"The Albanian aeronautical situation must be considered from V.E. with the Puglie *stop* from statistics month of November & December turns out that atmospheric conditions have very rarely allowed Albanian aeronautical activity & very rarely prevented that Puglie that tactical field has in the which could on the whole to operate for greater number of days then the Albania aeronautics *stop* for necessities immediate participation 46th bomber stormo must be thought sufficient since such participation can & must be integrated from the fighters *stop* circa transformation 38th stormo participation from Scutari, that it is for now only possible at the base of the stormo, more problematic is that give to the Puglie *stop* recognition squadrons will be transferred at once to Albania such *stop* demanded is made for before day 6th current *stop* Mussolini".

But Mussolini had sent also another dispatch and on completely different issue. With it, after to have remembered the order given on 4 December - as a result of the pessimistic telephone call of Soddu to Guzzoni - circa the defensive preparation of the line of the Skumbini and for the head of disembarkation of Valona, it asked comparisons on what a lot from " ⁽⁴⁾ had been realized" for how much thinks the military situation in improved Albania then. Something had been made, at least in the limits is allowed from the usable labor, the necessity primary to improve the state of the roadways in order to more assure the supply and the evacuations and from the defensives work on advanced lines.

Naturally study compiled from the operations section of the Armed forces high command existed a approximately the withdraw to complete in the ill-omened hypothesis of the breach of the front. Update to the situation of 5 January, it introduced the issue as it follows:

"In the extreme hypothesis that the events impose a general withdraw, and such to prevent the reconstitution of continuous a defensive alignment, from the Yugoslavian border to the sea, it is necessary to preview the withdraw to defense reduced to Valona and northern Albania (...).

The defense of Valona and of the Skumbini for how much separate, they must coordinate their action especially under the reactive aspect. Therefore it must continue to subsist a Comando Superiore. Center: Tirana, eventually Kruja.

At Valona, give the entity of the forces, the situation of isolation, the complexity of the defense (land front and sea front): a Commander of Army.

And opportune it is that one of the 11th.

In northern Albania: two Army Commanders, of which one in correspondence of gide line on Tirana and the other in correspondence of that one of Durazzo. Armed with Tirana: the 9th armed with Durazzo: one new, of which constituting command" ⁽⁵⁾.

4) DSCS, tele 5149/op. dated 4.1.1941.

5) DSCSFAA, operating Memorandum N. 1, dated 5.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Beyond considering the possibility of such hypothesis - worse - it was however necessary to determine the state puts into effect them for the war situation and to draw of the examination and appraisal of the finish of the problem a strategic address which to refer in the near future. As well as more such work of precise definition from part of the operations section became opportune, in how much the new Comandante Superiore had to express his will on the operating line to undertake and to assume the consequent responsibility:

"The action of Valona can be resolved in unfavorable sense, leaving to persist the threat, or favorably, averting the threat and improving our moral situation and of alignment.

In first, disgraceful, eventuality (...) it would be necessary to aim the feet in the sector of Valona and to consolidate the alignment - through new arrivals in the sectors Ambum, Osum, Tomorizza and Skumbini. If unfortunately the adversary did not leave us time and a general and such withdraw were prevailed to prevent the reconstitution of continuous a defensive alignment, it would finally impose catch in examination the solution to withdraw to the reduced defense of Valona and northern Albania (operating memorandum n. 1).

In the second eventuality (...), the situation will be able to say truly consolidated to our favor. It will be then possible to proceed to retake the Korçiano, indispensable premised to the resolute action that would have to be carried out along the director of Larissa. (...)

Two is the rearrangement problems: rearrangement of the alignment and regeneration of the units. They, well distinguished, go resolved in succession of time, and that is:

- before it is necessary to readjust the alignment in the sense to carry online organic units and to recompose in rear localities the divisions now scattered;
- then it is necessary to regenerate these last divisions, integrating them of men, of arm and means and elevating their tone with moral and training efficiency.

The first problem is operating; the second organic. Here it is limited to us to the first one of them (...).

So that, while it puts into effect the alignment aligns on the front about seventy pale battalions, intermingled, deprive of the characteristic cohesion of the divisional organism, without sector general reserves, the new alignment will be defined given:

-9 organic divisions in the first formation, that they will place in first group 50-55 Bns., constituent a nearly double mass of puts into effect them as far as force, armament and reactive ability; and in second group one score of Bns which sector reserves;

- The divisions of second and third formation, in course of reorganization (...). The performance of the new device will demand an important complex of movements to chain in order to transfer the new units online, to withdraw those replaced, to re-unite to the divisions the elements that have been some detached. As far as the times of performance, they can themselves be delineated in the following way:

- time (4-5 days): substitution in the fields Skumbini, Ambum, Bencla, Susniça and Litorale;

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

- The time (one ten of days): movements in order to re-unite to the divisions the elements that some are detached and arrangement of the alignment in the remaining sectors.

In total, therefore, fifteen or so days for giving a new garment to the device. Supposed that the action of Valona is carried out within the 15th current, it can be presumed that for the end of January indicated how much above can be completed.

Towards the end of February, to advanced rearrangement, could be carried out retake of the Korçiano, premised of final offensive"⁽⁶⁾.

For how much it concerned the reconstitution of the 11 divisions of second and third, formation appeared opportune to entrust it to the Comando Superiore for the *Julia* and *Centauro*, let alone for the quick elements of support, in the zone of Tirana – Kavaja - Rrogozhine; to the 9th Army for its five divisions (*Venezia, Arezzo, Taro, Parma* and *Tridentina*) in the Qukes – Librazhd – Elbasan - Gramshi zone; to the 11th Army for *Bari, Modena, Ferrara* and *Pusteria* in the zone Berat – Lushnja – Fieri - Valona.

The problem, but, went deepened in order to calculate the requirements in men, arms, and the period of time necessary for the execution of the transports means and material. This last one, in particular, was influenced from the possibilities of drainage in the ports; from the entity of the transports; from the conditions of the sea and the naval situation in the Adriatic. The eventual arrival of a German division in Albania would naturally have slowed down the rhythm of the affluence for the completion of major unit.

In conclusion, in approximately 25 days the mountain divisions could be put to place, that days for amalgam and expansion then needed of others 15-20; in successes to 28-30 days the 9 more worn out divisions of infantry and the celeri troops could have been reordered, which to they time demanded 15-20 days for amalgam and expansion; since the beginning and in order not less than 70-80 days must have run the hoard of the *minimal* supplies.

Beginning, therefore, the exposed program 15-20 January, was possible to have ready for the action the alpine G.U., with the respective supplies, to the end of February. The other divisions and the supplies for offensives to wide beam only could be available at the end of March or mid April. This, in short, the general plan of rearrangement of the device to conclusion of the good outcome of the defensive battle. But in order to hold a point of reference, it is also far away, were sketches the features of the successive offensive battle. It was seen break down

6) DSCSFAA, operating Memorandum n. 2, dated 5.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

in the two it is made of retake Korçano and the exploitation of the success.

The action for retake Korçano, and in such a way creating the favorable atmosphere for the ulterior development of the conclusive operations against Greece, demand speed of movements in order to reach on the objective before that the adversary had the time to adorn the draw threat to the rear of his alignment, between Osum valleys and Pogradec, and entity of such forces to make to weigh such threat in decisive way, preventing to the enemy makes headway with the troops that it would be possible to collect.

The maneuver, to which they were fixed as objectives the possession of the basin of Korça and the control of the crossroads of Bilishti, evidently had to be entrusted to the 9th Army with three army corps.

The result of the offensive had to only consist in the collapse of the entire front of the Korçano, being this fed from the roadway Florina – Bilishti - Korça. The new Italian alignment would have been leaned to the alignment Suhagora – Morova - Q. Qarrit - Ostravice, knitting then with it puts into effect them line until sea ⁽⁷⁾.

The second phase, is worth to say the exploitation of the success, excluded the guide line Florina - Salonicco or Florina – Larissa - Athens, because divergent regarding the course of the front from the Tomori to the sea (to think not make inroads), for which the troops destined to operate in correspondence of them would be removed from the bulk of the Greek army. An action towards Florina was instead considering in relation to the German offensive on Salonicco, but as distinguished operation. To the ends of the continuation of the Italian detached effort of the director Korça - Erseke-Ponte Perati-Kalibaki, almost parallel to the front and decidedly more profitable. The study thought an army corps necessary with four divisions, beyond to parts of the two Corps that already had achieved the breach and the conquest of Bilishti. In such a way the entire Greek army would have found between the anvil of the frontal pressure of all the 11th Army and the hammer with turning mass⁽⁸⁾.

On the maneuver design it does not seem can be moved substantial observations; undoubtedly the premises were reliable, guiding of attack the obvious ones, the calculation of the forces acceptable, the full result. Only, it seems lawful to formulate some reserves on the appraisal

7) DSCSFAA, operating Memorandum n. 5, dated 20.1.1941.

8) DSCSFAA, operating Memorandum n. 6, dated 28.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of being able to anticipate of eight days prepared you for the action on Korça, carrying the beginning of the offensive to 20 February rather than to March, let alone on the probability to decide for the end of February the supplies being necessary in order to reach Korça and to continue of by impulse on the Perati Bridge, "*holding present that will probably be dealt more than one army dared that of true and own battle*". In fact the sensitive increase of the medium potentiality of the ports was considered positively continuous, both for the work that came are executed and because it would have been gone towards the spring; to this it was from adding the not still determined arrival of the German division, that it carried to *integrally use the possibilities of drainage of the ports*. Now, is sure likely that in the circumstances assumed the exploitation of the success would not have demanded a new battle, however the burning experience made, to have churns with an insufficient logistic apparatus, with pictures and troops not conveniently trained, with inadequate a divisional ordering to the reality of the combat, and finally the knowledge of the disorder with which the difficult transports via sea and aircraft had carried personal, material and means in Albania, advised to an extreme precaution in merit not a lot to the times of performance of the operating design as far as the effective possibility of abbreviate. And also they suggested to only renounce to audacities, lawful to a sure efficient instrument or against an adversary sure gained, situation this last one to verify being famous that the Greeks were disposed to leave every opened door the Germans also to succeed to prevent to the Italians to advance. If the optimism with which the operating memory was closed left to clearly be transparent the insistent pressures of Rome, is disappointed that it has not been exposed to Mussolini with brutal frankness the necessity not to shrink beyond the safety limit the times, sure not excessive given the cited logistic ties. Unfortunately such optimism, at the moment is just to recognize it - only emerged as hope not unfounded, will become rushed soon and will lead unavoidably to another let-down.

2. THE GREEK OFFENSIVE ON BERAT.

After New Year's Day the combats had a short pause on all fronts. Also for the Greeks it was necessary a some breath. The day

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of the 6th Gen. Papagos circulated his directives for the operating activity of January (sketch n. 74):

"1) The crisis of supply due to the bad climatic conditions does not allow to think to decisive offensives if after its not to attenuate itself.

On the other hand the replacing of the losses in personnel, draft animals and material will demand a sure time.

2) During this period the offensive operations of the G.U. will stretch to limited objectives, being of primary importance the remittance in efficiency of the units, the regularization of the communications, the restoration of the normal flow of the supply and evacuations.

3) The task of the SAMO is limited to assure the possession of the plateau of Korça. In particular, for how much it concerns the valley of the Tomorreces remains the necessity to maintain the contact with the II Corps and for cover of the right flank. The operations in of valley of the Tomorreces for the moment will have simply to guarantee Guri i Prer and the channel that passes from said hill, let alone to eliminate the residual Italian resistances on the ridge of Mali Kulmakes.

4) The II C.A. must conquer the crossroad of Klisura, blocking every origin the West and reaching the Taronine – Suka - Podgorani alignment placing itself in measure to facilitate the offensive resumption.

5) The C.A. must:

- in val Zagorias, to reject the enemy to north of the Vojussa;
- in Dhrinos valley, gradually to push the enemy towards Tepeleni and to block vallys of the Vojussa;
- on the Kurvelesh, to get hold securely the zone of Lekdushaj. If possible without excessive engagement, to reach and relieve to north of Nivice.

6) General reserve at disposition of the Supreme Command: 4th, 5th and 6th Inf. Div. and the cavalry Div."⁽⁹⁾.

As it is seen, some resolute intention did not exist, but it was on the base of this address that come up and developed the battle for Berat. There were engaged, from the sea to the Kamia, The II Corps with function of breach (without but that an immediate continuation was previewed), the I and the V with tasks substantially of safety on the flanks.

The II Corps was already more than oriented on the part assigned: *"the fight supported until to the 3 January - the Greek official relation wrote - demonstrated that the enemy introduced a consisting front again, above all on the position of Mali Topajanit"* and, of other part, was not in a position to continuing without to have carried ahead the artilleries and to have restore the equipments. Consequently Gen. Papadopoulos, reordered the forces, had arranged the resumption of the action for the conquest of *Mali Topajanit*, and possibly of M. Taronine, on 5 January.

9) Greek S.M.E., AP, cit, vol. III, app. 27.

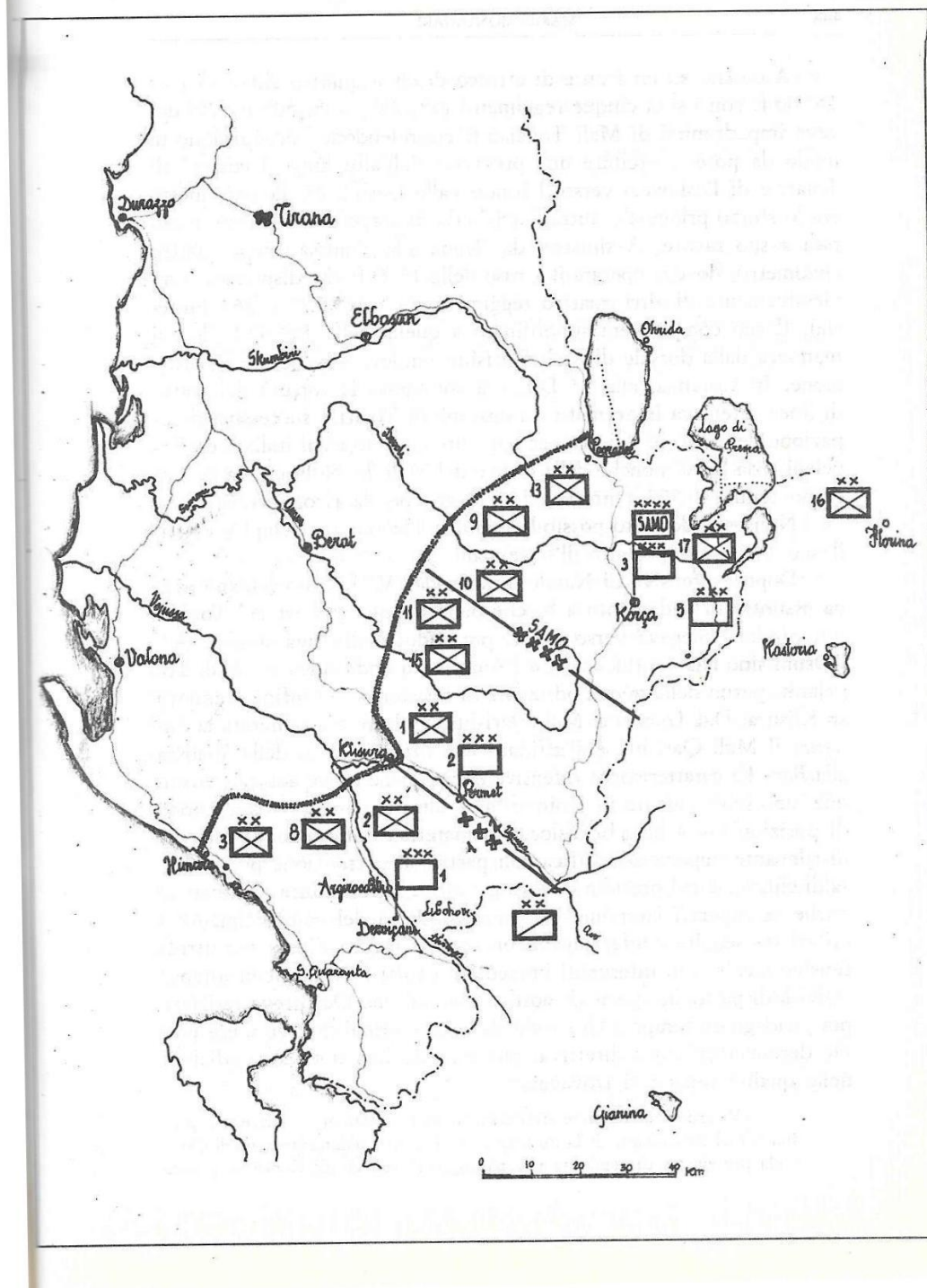
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 443

The Greek alignment on 6 January 1941

Schizzo n. 74

LO SCHIERAMENTO GRECO IL 5 GENNAIO 1941



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

To the right, on a front of attack of approximately four kilometers, 15th Inf. Div. with its five regiments (5th, 28th, 33rd, 50th and 90th) the occupation had to get hold of Mali Topajanit, extending some so as to be able to exercise a pressure from the top along the ridges of Tolari and Leskoveci towards the bottom Deshnices valley. Since this was the main effort, all the army corps artillery was oriented to its favor. On the left, from Begna to the Vojussa (approximately four kilometers), the bulk of the 1st Inf. Div. had to operate that it had other four regiments altogether (4th, 16th, 7th and 36th infantry). Its task was subordinated to that one of the 15th Inf. Div., whose maneuver from the ridge of Mali Qarishta stretched to unblock the situation. In short, to the 1st Inf. Div. the breach of the feature of defensive line hinged on ridge of Tolari and the successive occupation of the crossroad of Klisura was blocked in order to prevent counterattacks Italians from Tepeleni and Suka, let alone of the chain of the Mali Trebeshines. In reserve the was held the 52nd infantry and II reconnaissance group.

Not being be possible to mount the action in the previewed times, its beginning was moved on 8 January.

After the offensive of Natale the line of the Italian VIII Corps it had assumed a S course, than from the slopes south-east of the Tomori (Q. Sirakut) folded towards the west, carrying itself on the left river of the Osum until to the confluence with the Ambum, therefore it climbed on the Mali Topajanit, hinge of the resistance new position, and finally it came down on Klisura. From the Tomori to the Mali Qarishta (excluded) was line up of the *Pusteria*; the Mali Qarishta were entrusted to the *Julia*; the furrow of the Vojussam to *Bari*. The defensive characteristics were those by now adopted everywhere: a alignment in depth - at least as predisposition of positions - to at least locates the material interdiction of the way of important tactical importance with particular attention for the key strong points, whose garrison had to guarantee the function continuity even if exceeded laterally. On the conduct of the combat the criteria to follow confirmed a defensive attitude counteroffensive premises, with immediate participations to all the levels and with intense activity of patrols especially by night and with fog. It was necessary to resist in order to earn time and of space to yield by now there was no more.

An only directive derived some, also being very notes the conditions in which the units was found:

"I order You to resist courageous on the positions - Gen. Bancalè wrote to the commander of the *Pusteria* - and to hold steady in the zone of Cerovoda in order to avoid such availability passage to the enemy *stop* Army Headquarter

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

& I we do not admit yielding *stop* Executed counterattack with forces at your disposition very prepared & supported from artilleries *stop* You keep in mind who enemy forces ended up on Osum valley must be insufficient entity given to difficulty passages put into effect them season *stop* Army Headquarter want from part yours much tight energy & connection with your battalions " ⁽¹⁰⁾,

"(...) while I confirm categorical orders to assure & to maintain crossroads mount Mali Topajanit & line doubling – Gen. Geloso insisted - I order that any thing is assured at all costs balance Klisura possession effects on other points *stop* Defend Klisura must be maintained at whichever cost & defending to die on place if start is necessary *stop* At followed two battalions sent to you puts at your disposition & motorized 75/27 group *stop* Is absolutely necessary to resist & to last because new troops are in arrival from Italy *stop* Must succeed to over turn the situation". ⁽¹¹⁾

Effectively the arrivals in course gave hope to a sure optimism also, are repeated, recognizing the large difficulties to contain the enemy efforts without to spend at once the troops flowed from Italy. The decision to change the articulation of command, passing the *Pusteria* to the orders of the IV Army Corps (Gen. Mercalli), was taken on 2 January. The new army corps was constituted by the foretold *Pusteria*, that it conserved tasks and deployment in action; by the *Lupi di Toscana* Inf. Div. (Gen. Bollea), in the zone of Berat, and by the *Siena* (Gen. Carta), also in way of affluence and reconstitution in the outskirts of Berat. A task of static defense was assigned and with of dynamics reaction: to block the valley of Osum, prohibiting to the adversary the outlet on Berat, and against maneuvering in the cares of the eventual origins from the valleys of Tomorreces, Osum and Vojussa. The sector of the IV Corps corresponded therefore to the front held by the *Pusteria*, behind which the maneuver mass was collected. It was be a matter of a temporary task and a device: once carried out the substitution of the troops online between the Osum and the Vojussa would have come to lack the reason to conserve the division of the position of resistance between VIII and IV Corps.

Truly, Geloso would have wished to give at once the change to the *Julia* using the *Lupi*, but Cavallero was clearly opposed considering most serious error spending it into reserve before the action; error already made unfortunately in the cares of the *Brennero*, that better

10) DS Commando VIII army corps, tele 1/1478 op. dated 27.12.1941.

11) DS Commando 11th army, tele 029323/op. dated 30.12.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

would have been to hold to hand capacity rather than to employ on the Kurvelesh, "*much more than there was no serious danger*". Therefore the *Lupi* had to be kept for a violent retort and not for a flat defense in place. To honor of the true one, than on the Kurvelesh the danger he had not been very serious was stated alone when the combatants were get exhausted (after the participation of the *Brennero*). And sure that in the last days of December the XXV Corps had many and well founded reasons in order to fear the breach of the front held by the *Modena* and the unavoidable Greek reduction until Tepeleni. As far as the *Lupi*, after all the pitiful examples denied of pernicious breaking up of the units, the convenience to avoid of the premature use was certain, but it comes made to wonder until that point could be asked the *Julia* - reduced to a ghost - to still resist on the Topajanit. Was not perhaps better to renew with one fresh division all the defense of the field and to recall the at once the *Julia* back? The speech is pure academic because, if Gen. Geloso had taken the decision to order - substitution, the change would have happened for the note in coincidence of the Greek attack, with consequences still gets worse of that would have taken place. One has agreed, however, just in this case to evidence *vexata quaestio* that it tormented all the commanders of major unit "circa the employment of the reinforcements coming from Italy. To employ them at once, therefore as they were in order to prevent the feared breakthrough or to collect them and to organize them in the rears, leaving to the troops of line the task to hold at whichever cost, with the risk not to succeed to equally avoid the breach of the front, losing for moreover the defenders, uselessly sacrificed?

Gen. Cavallero did not have any intention to commit himself in adventures. Having to attack - in part because insistently ordered by Mussolini, and in part because effectively limited operations could contribute in remarkable measure to lighten the weight of the defense - he wished that had place avoiding surprised, with methodical advance, in successive groups, with immediate systemizing of the units on the positions reached, with a ready organization of the fire to every jump, even if short. It was in fact possible that the Italian offensive was met with analogous Greek initiative in the field of the shoreline, that it in short imposed to put itself in a position to transforming the action into defensive; but the eventuality existed also that more or less at the same time the enemy resumed the attack on Klisura. In such case the *Lupi* had to take part with extreme decision and to mass in order to reach Qarista and Fratarit and, if possible,

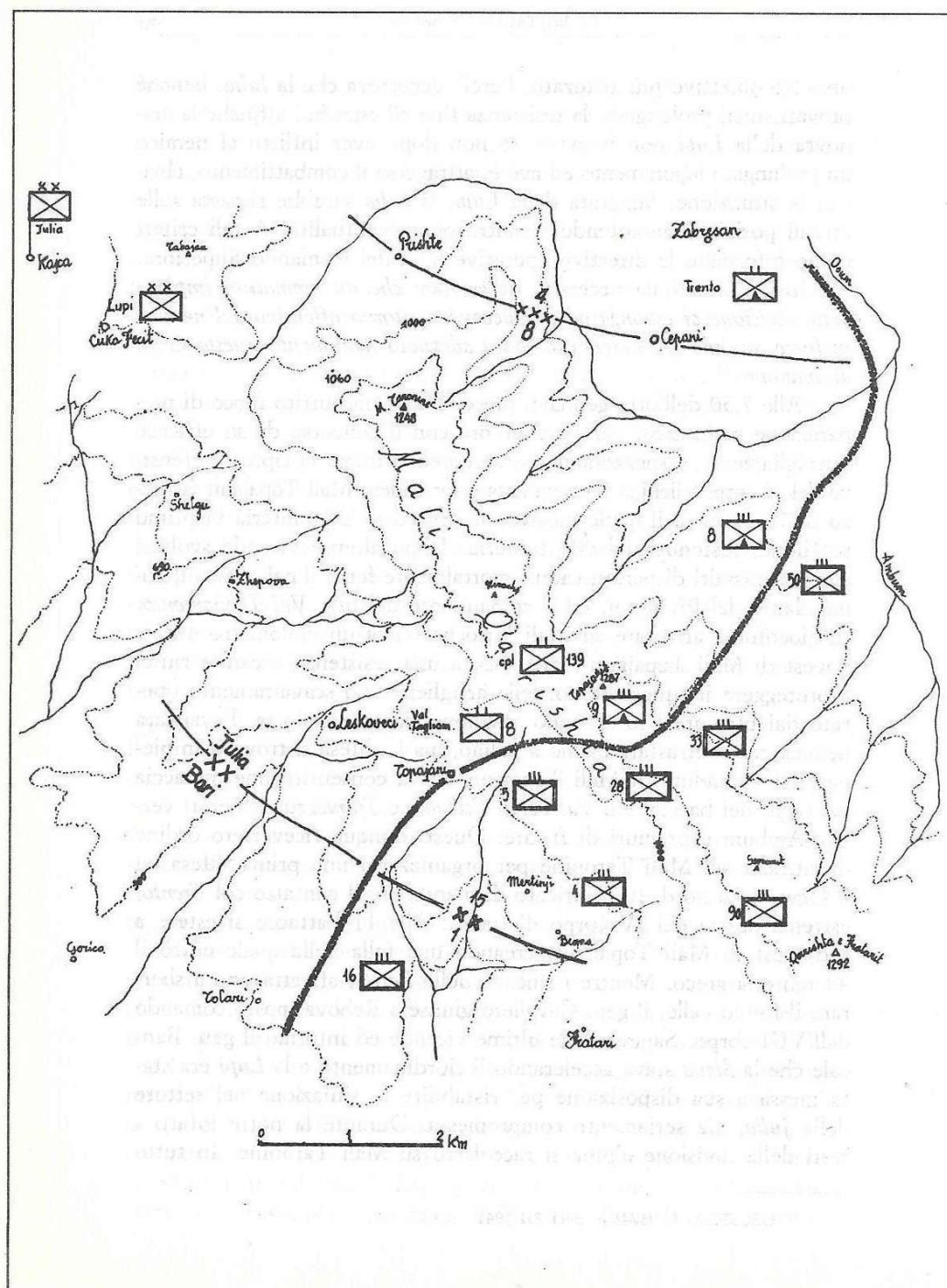
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

another more advanced objective. Therefore it was necessary that the *Julia*, although worn-out, extended the resistance until the end, so that the maneuver of the *Lupi* did not begin if not after to have inflicted to the enemy a extended wearing down and possession, through the combat, cleared the situation. Exceeded by the *Lupi*, the *Julia* would be remained on put into effect their positions guaranteeing them against every eventuality. To such criteria the operating directives were informed n. 9 of the Comando Superiore, that they insisted on the necessity "*to avoid that a premature employment of the division exposes us to a successive offensive return of the enemy in forces, having already weakened without adapted to rendering this G. U. of maneuver*"⁽¹²⁾.

At 07:30 of eight January, preceded by a nourished protracted fire of preparation for approximately an hour with the competition of an effective bombing and aerial strafing the offensive resumed by the Greek II Corps had beginning, determined to make to fall Mali Topajanit (sketch n. 75), against which the 28th moved and the 33rd infantry in first group, supported by the 90th infantry. After alternate vicissitudes carried out with counter assault deprived of hope, fallen mortally wounded Col. Tavoni, commander of the 9th alpine, and the commander of Vai Tagliamento Bn., were necessary to withdraw on Mali Hiroche (approximately a kilometer to northwest of Mali Topajanit), once resistance where still upset succeeded protect the withdraw of the artilleries. The operated overtaken by the Greeks 6 Bn. in the second group relit the fight; the enemy advance was contrasted hand to hand, but the defense was found in full crisis: the fall of Mali Topajanit had concurred a threat on the back of the battalions *Val Felta*, *Cividale* and *Tolmezzo*, lined up towards the Ambum and pressed from the front. These therefore will receive order to withdraw on the Mali Taronine in order to organize a forward defense and the *Gemonia*, to north, was in charge to maintain the contact with the *Trento*, extreme right of the IV Army Corp. At 11:00 the attack extended to the south-west of Mali Topajanit, creating a leek in which the Greek 4th infantry entered. While the support of *Bari* they hurried to block the valley, Gen. Cavallero reached Rehova, command post of the VIII Corps. He knew of the last vicissitudes and he informed Gen. Bancale that the *Siena* was accelerating the reorganization and the *Lupi* had been put to its disposition in order to re-establish the situation in the field of the *Julia*, already seriously compromised. During the night in fact the remainder of the mountain division were collected on Mali Taronine. In all

12) DSCSFAA, f. 0374/op. Dated 8.1.1941.

L'ATTACCO GRECO AL MALI QARISHTA (8-9 GENNAIO)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

they amounted to a thousand of men, with 12 machine-guns, 25 guns machine gunners and 5 mortars: it was what remained of the battalions who on 28 October had begun the adventure of the Pindo and that from the bridge of Perati they were withdrawn step by step.

According to the orders given by Gen. Bancale, the *Lupi* had to climb over the *Julia* and to head at Mali Topajanit (intermediate objective), then at Qarishta and Fratarit (objective of the attack), with one compact formation, to successive big waves of battalions most of them in attack columns, and with the maximum decision. Exceeded the intermediate objective, the *Julia* would have been brought back in ahead retake until new order the positions of Mali Topajanit. Then, the final success achieved, the *Bari* would in its turn have moved own the left so as to connect itself to the southern slopes of Qarishta and Fratarit. In any case, Gen. D'Havet it was ordered "*to hold Klisura at all costs and, if threatened still mainly on the flank and the rear, to form above all reduced withdraw his left as much as possible higher and blocking the mule track*", and to Gen. Girotti "*at all costs to defend Mali Taronine*" until the limit of the field with the *Pusteria*. In late evening Cavallero sent a long message to Mussolini:

"Enemy offensive on the Klisura front the Commander in the area was for us attended & had taken appropriated measures in order to support the offensive action stop But the reinforcement of the *Lupi* division of *Tuscany* could not, in spite of trucked stages & although forced march also by night, to reach in position before today stop the troops in the area had the task to hold until the arrival of the reinforcements stop the huge forces of the enemy spread, that its maximum effort completes there, they have produced to yielding *Julia* division that has dragged with it other contiguous units therefore to put in danger the same Klisura stop.

In the afternoon today I have confirmed personally that field commander to hold Klisura until the end perceiving that our counterattack will produce to tomorrow morning stop, All that I expose in order to represent the situation faithfully & not absolutely in order to dramatize because situated presence in of the *Lupi di Toscana*, that is by now all entire one on the line of departure for counterattack, has restored mind to all & thinks that counterattack will be sure effective because tomorrow for the first valley & turns the enemy will be found of ahead our compact action & fed in depth stop Also its flanks will be blocked tomorrow with new forces stop Hopes restoration situation stop places but problem of feeding this fight on the base of a repeat counter-offensive while not there are more reserves available (...).

As far as our offensive from Valona all considered weighed & creed would be to play of hazard to deliver it before to have cleared situation Klisura area: that that will be able to demand still some day"⁽¹³⁾.

13) DSCSFAA, tele. 0453/op. dated 9.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

While the *Lupi* hurried to reach Kajca and Çuka Fecit, a new strong enemy action rejected on Mali Tabajan the *Julia* and Greek patrols intercepted the roadway Suka - Klisura. At dawn of the 10th after a night of uninterrupted rain, in presence of a strong low fog, left the counterattack of the *Lupi di Toscana*, delivered by the 77th infantry (lacking in the accompaniment battery), by the 78th infantry (without mortar company and battery of accompaniment), by the 3rd alp. artillery of the *Julia* ⁽¹⁴⁾. One had to be lead to successive big waves of two battalions, with a strong centralization. Unfortunately the action not fated for the hoped outcome: met with an analogous movement of the Greek 15th Inf Div. it succeeded to arrest it, but the first group began nevertheless to come apart under the fire of the adversary. Towards 16:00, of the two battalions, one, that especially among the officials had endured most remarkable losses, encircled and intensely struck, seemed to have itself to consider lost, the other found in series given difficulty the slow approach of the second group, which Gen. Bollea had while ordered to take part to support of the first one. In the meantime, in the course of the morning, Cavallero had gone to Fieri and he had pointed out to the opportunity to withdraw to the Commander of the VIII Corps and to make to replace the IV in order to entrust the reins of the left of the 11th Army "to fresh energies", considered the new phase of the fight. Geloso convene on such idea and ordered that Gen. Mercalli was moved at once with his organs of command to Rehova, finding responsibility and tasks of the VIII Corps - than have to carry himself to Berat, with function of reserve - and conserving those related to the Osum area. In support, as long as thought necessary by Mercalli, they would be remained

14). The 3rd alp. artillery was composed of the groups *Udine*, *Lanzo*, *Val Tanaro* and III/47th, for total 28 guns. To the division also lacked the 81 mm mortars Bn., the guns from 47/32 co. and the cc.nn. legion. The *Lupi*, than in June 1940 had participated to the operations on the western forehead, which G.U. of reservoir of the 1st Army, was retruned in the last decade of October to the normal centers of peace. As a result of the notes ministerial dispositions replaced in dismissal a strongly share of the recalled and soon after new share of trained personnel transferred to other divisions in preparation. On 6 December began, in its turn the preparation, starting practically from zero. The operation had to be completed before 31 December. But the 29th first groups began the transfer in order to reach the employment zone. The morning the 30th, a message of Dir. Sup. Transports had that in morning the Commander of division left for Foggia from where he would be air-transported to Albania. In the succeeding days followed the other elements of major unit, that they disembarked when 77th and the 78th, remarkably fail to fulfill for the lack of personnel, regimental units, all means of transport, were already engaged in combat.

The 7th the *Lupi* from the zone of Berat, where had gathered, came started on Rehova and the successive day was moved to Hani Balaban, from where it carried on the ridge of Mali Qarishta (9 January), in the zone of Kajca-Çuka Fecit, in order to counterattack.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

on the place the under secretary G.S., with share of the office services, and the Commanders artillery and engineers of the VIII.

Oriented on the situation, Gen. Mercalli wanted first of all to assure the *Lupi* that the *Bari* and the *Pusteria*, to his flanks, would have maintained the connection with Mali Tabajan and decided that "*tomorrow morning, at first light, absolutely must resume the attack of Mali Taronine & decidedly beyond*", keeping himself in measure to act with the groups withdrawn on the flank and the rear of eventual tried enemy of turning. To part deficiencies of varied order, already emerged, was being made, to feel in heavy way the disadvantage of a bad operation of services for the deficiency of baggage train: the ammunitions situation was extremely deficit air and those provisions unsatisfactory. An air supply attempt had had the result to lose good part of the material, because fallen too much close to the enemy lines or quite between of them. In short, morning of 11 January the infantry of the division appeared already jolt, being strongly reduced the combative ability to a battalion and already used the second group. Little wonder, therefore, if the evening returned on the lines of departure, without to have achieved any result and for converged having already damaged all the six battalions. In the following days, for how much its task had become exclusively defensive, the splitting continued progressively. Some day still and the crisis would have been realized in a complete yielding. The not positive test of the *Lupi* aroused fuss. Sure it had many attenuating: mobilization hastily and disembarked it fails to fulfill in Albania, was reached the zone of employment worn-out because of one long march in adverse atmospheric conditions in order to attack immediately; it was lacking in baggage train, materials of transmissions, part of the equipments; it had inherited the artilleries of the *Julia*, already tried, with which understandings and agreements had been taken late at night; before reaching the lines of departure it had crossed the rears and the back of the alignment of troops many wear and tear with relative wounds and missing. However the task entrusted them was obvious, in how much it up put the division, on the ridge, where this constituted bastion, with the flanks in ahead in the strong positions of Çuka Fecit to right and Mali Tabajan on the left. From here, proceeding with six compact battalions, it could be in conditions for acting with effectiveness. Instead the solution of continuity introduced at the beginning it facilitated the infiltration of Greek units, than endured they could blow up the hinge. All the foretold difficulties did not seem but to explain to sufficiently the events, as others

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

units previously, also entered in the vigor of the fight in conditions of equal roughness if it does not get worse, had resisted better to the test.

In war the misadventure are not ever alone. At the same time to the cited facts, another event, perhaps less serious but than more detached resonance, had provoked sharp repercussions: Klisura had fallen. In the afternoon of the 9th the commander of the 140th infantry, collected around to Klisura, had communicated of to have comprised the order to conserve those positions and their importance, and to have added: *"My left completely is truned because they have withdrawn all the contiguous units stop has ordered to all to resist to the end on the position and to barricade in the strong points and the houses of Klisura but the encircling it is in order to be complete and I do not know how much will still be able to hold stop I hope of being able to maintain myself on the place all the night, but I preview that it will be difficult to exceed the dawn"*. For effect of the withdraw from Mali Topajanit to Mali Taronine the line of *Bari* ran now of cutting across from Zhepova (the south-west of Mali Taronine) along the ridge that it came down to Gorica, then followed furrows of Sali Deshnices until to Klisura. This therefore completely was exposed to east. Its importance was given from the obstruction of furrows adducing to Tepeleni, from the control of the access to the Mali Trebeshines and from the interdiction of the free use from Greek part of the roadway at the bottom of the Vojussa-Deshnices valleys. Its weakness, for how much has drawn to the village of Klisura and surrounding positions, were in the fact that, in the early afternoon of 9 January the *Julia* had been forced to leave Malj Taronine and to withdraw further on Mali Topajanit. The *Lupi*, collection between Kajca and Çuka Fecit, had to re-establish the next day the situation, while the 31st infantry of the *Siena* - that, for how much reconstituted nearly complete, its commander not still declared in a position to acting offensively - received dispositions to realize one obstruction in val Deshnices to the height of Suka, to protection of the artilleries. Then at 07:30 of 10 January the XXV Corps signaled that in night patrol of the 2nd bersaglieres, push in recognition until to Klisura for the connection with the extreme right of the VIII Corps, it was re-entry without to have met some and with the feeling that the front of Klisura had been cleared. The news moreover was confirmed from a patrol of the 152nd Bn. cc.nn. Naturally General Rossi perceived to have immediately tidy to the group alpine "Pizzi" not to withdraw a step from the Brezhanit *"no matter what happens"* and to the 2nd bersaglieres to assure the obstruction of the furrow

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Klisura- Tepeleni. The news of the abandonment of Klisura unexpected reached the Command of the 11th Army and the Comando Superiore - initially disbelieving the - but telephone call of Cavallero to Rome was taken care of a dosage of minimization and good hopes in order to calm Mussolini:

"I have been late in order to collect the elements of all the fields. The situation for Klisura is not good without being but dramatic. Yesterday the first decisive effort on Klisura has been supported from the troops in place because the reinforces could not arrive, before. Such first action given from two divisions has produced no remarkable regression: approximately six kilometers. The *Julia* has yielded sooner than previewed but the breach was unavoidable. The *Lupi* has arrived in place by forced march and has rested in the afternoon. Today it has advanced good and it has met the attack of a third division as it turns out from operations order found taken a prisoner. News still lacks the attack against the *Julia*. The *Lupi* has advanced of approximately three kilometers and the enemy has withdrawn. Exhausted the first group, the *Lupi* has made the climb over the second group, than but it has not engaged itself. The continuous action tomorrow and from it depends the course of the new line that demonstrates already more economic (...). The troops in Klisura had had from me the order, personally, to defend itself until the end. Yesterday evening nearly was encircled. They have held still all the day today, but Col. Carlà that is a valorous and had approximately thousand men has withdrawn towards the lower valley obstruction in order to escape to the imminent encirclement. They are desolated. In spite of my personal orders this withdraw has happened towards the lower valley obstruction that it is held from a regiment of infantry⁽¹⁵⁾. It has lost no material except two or three guns. The alignment of the artilleries is to the place setting. Today the troops of the IV Corps have entered online. Commander, Mercalli, already oriented in the Osum field and that already he had given the directives to the *Lupi* believing to guide it he, has replaced online the Commander of the VIII C A. and has taken the direction of the operations (...).

If, as I think, the effort today is the last one is to place because before the day after tomorrow I have the infantry of a division near Berat and the situation will be dominated. You had said to me that they would have still given a hard blow: they have given. Been sure that with it reinforcements the situation will be dominated (...).

Klisura is a country of four shacks; to show off the capture, I know it (...). If the *Lupi* did not meet the enemy attack would have freed Klisura in day (...). From the attack tomorrow depends the line on which we will leave"⁽¹⁶⁾.

Mussolini strongly was hit from the event above all for effect of the widening of the news transmitted from the radios of London

15) The news was not exact. The rests of the 140th Inf. had withdrawn, keeping itself to mid coast, along the Mali Trebeshines ils.

16) Cavallero Diary, date 10.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

and of Athens; one became stiff and it made to ask clarification from general Guzzoni:

"Duce wishes particulars visa vie Klisura abandonment that it contrasts with fixed orders that It had given stop He awaits also to know provisions taken "⁽¹⁷⁾.

Failed the counterattack of the *Lupi* the evacuation of Klisura, occupied by Greek patrols without contrast lost part of its importance also. However the two added events imposed precautionary measures. In so far as Geloso wrote to Mercalli:

"the come situation to create as a result of the last events, and estimated in all its possible consequences, demand some provisions estimates of urgent character to which I only point out and exclusive personal guideline of V.E., and that is (...) I have given to dispositions to the army engineer corps Commander because beginnings the defensive systemizing on the following line, constituent axis of one new eventual position of resistance to the end: confluence Proj Bronecit – Osum - Mali mule track Trepeli - crossroads of Chiaf and Trepeli (hill 740) mule track cross roads (hill 955) Bregu mule track Gliulei- crossroad of Chiaf and Bubesit- Bubesit - mule track cross roads of hill 668 mule track and roadway (source)-crossroad of Chiaf and Chiciocut - Mali Trebeshines (...).

I repeat that the indication of the positions of which over has simple value of personal guideline of V.E. and that puts into effect the positions must therefore be held secure in order to conserve a wider breath to the defense of Berati and the possibilities of maneuver in action as long as possible ⁽¹⁸⁾.

Then Geloso informed of such guidelines Bancale and the task entrusted it to organize with urgency the rear defensive position, taking agreements with the army engineer corps and deploying as soon as possible, the *Pinerolo* in the feature from Q. Bubesit to Mali Trebeshines⁽¹⁹⁾.

In the second week of January they had been taken place in operating field and to discipline to some phenomena of a sure gravity. Positions of great importance had been abandoned for wrong initiative of subordinate commanders in absence of enemy pressure. If first actions of the sort, also always denied and dangerous, had had repercussions that in the general picture could reabsorbed, now nearly to the northern margin of the large mountain strip, the risk of solutions of continuities not more solderable was introduced.

17) DSCSFAA, tele 102358/77-2-4 Gab. dated 13.11.1941.

18) DS Commander 11th Army, f. 02922/op. dated 11.1.1941.

19) The morning of the 11th Gen. De Stefanis, commander of the *Pinerolo*, came convened from Cavallero: "*I inform him that necessity imposes to employ his division as one at first infantry brigade. If he wanted to the complete itself to be employed at least twenty days would be necessary. I order to go to Fieri from Exc. Geloso for agreements*" (Cavallero diary).

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Consequently, the importance of some positions increased to excess. One of these was Tepeleni and is deeply meaningful the letter "*closely classified to the person*" which Geloso sent to the Gen. Rossi:

"(...) I have already ordered you, in another occasion, that anything happens to the flanks of your Tepeleni army corps it must hold, even if it had completely to be encircled (...). I want now, in remembering such orders, inviting you to organize not only the defense of the localities, that it is already in action, but to assure me that it has been designated, for every event, the commander and the destined garrison to the defense of the locality, commander and garrison whose delivery must be clear and precise: "to remain in place and to resist until death, even if completely encircled" (...) "⁽²⁰⁾".

To part the problem of the Tomorreces valley that could render the situation of the 9th Army serious from one moment to the other, Cavallero was taken care for the *Julia* and for *Bari*, that it knew next to the breach limit. It did not want to insist too much with the *Lupi* so that it was resumed. And there was also the issue, always in suspended, of the offensive on the shoreline, to whose Geloso care represented that it seemed they were increasing enemy forces at the head of Sushica valley and that the level of the ammunitions did not allow to make trouble: the IV Corps had 1/3 of unfoc for 75/13, the XXV Corps of one unfoc for all and special Corps of one unfoc and 3/4. The rounds from 100 and 105 were also very insufficient. In short, it could be given run to the offensive, but it was necessary the absolute guarantee of the immediate and uninterrupted supply. On the other hand he was afraid himself of there being a Greek attack on Valona preceded that one of the special Corps of Messe. Cavallero, finally, realized directives n. 10, with which it fixed the offensive resumption in the field of Valona for the 14th or the 15th, less than the adverse westher did not prevent the participation of aviation, while for that one in the field of Berat it sent back the date to when *Pinerolo* it would have been, with the maximum possible speed, completed. Moreover it sped up the resolution of the problem of the rearrangement of units⁽²¹⁾. The evening of the 12th, making the point on the events, communicated to Mussolini:

"On the 8th on the front of the IV Corps the enemy offensive of decisive character has been begun, with advance payment because it was preannounce for the 10th. Which had advance payment to feeling arrival of ours reinforcements. Therefore for Klisura the enemy had the precedence on Valona. Attack of the first day has found line little consisting because the *Julia* has lost many officials. A breakthrough

20) DS Commando 11th Army, f. 021206/op. dated 15.1.1941.

21) DSCSFAA, f. 0556/op. dated 12.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

in these conditions it could not be avoided and it has carried to that regression that you meet. The *Bari*, also tired, that it held troops over and under Klisura had crumbled and has yielded. The *Lupi* had to counterattack and to re-establish the situation. It has arrived the 9th at 16:00, after one diurnal march of 35 kilometers and one nocturnal of 9. And state necessary to resist to the temptation to employ it and to give them rest, otherwise was a crash. Left to the attack the morning after, has met with an enemy attack of quadruple forces. The action of the *Lupi* has stopped them. Therefore the division has acquitted in satisfactory way its tasks. Yesterday with the *Lupi* he has been attempted to advance, but the same Commander of C A. has judged that it was useless to wear it away without results. It is already remarkable what it has obtained.

There is the episode of Klisura. We will see this matter. Mercalli, than from the day before yesterday has taken command, has demonstrated great energy and has reestablish the front on the line yesterday communicated. Until this moment it is not solid. Although supported the *Lupi* (that it is on three groups), the valley is closed from troops that do not have the necessary consistency. Fortunately I have reordered the *Siena* with new elements. Therefore I have been able to ahead carry the 31st to obstruction of the roadway. There are still elements of *Bari* and a part of the *Julia* of approximately 800 men, than Biglia has taken in hand in these days and that today they have made a counterattack, resuming a small share that has but remarkable importance (...)"⁽²²⁾.

The moment was turbulent: on one side the tactical uncertainty of some features of the front of the two Armies; from another the issue of the German participation in eastern Macedonian orients and/or in Albania; then the rearrangement of the divisions; then still one planning to wide meshes for unfavorable favorable hypotheses or also longer expiration. The all dominated one from the fact that the initiative of the operations from two months was in Greek hand. The fall of Klisura carried to a re-examination of the situation: the regressions in the valleys Tomorreces, Osum and Deshnices sketch had carried the contact line to assume a waved course (n. 76), forming three opposing salient with concern to us the Tomori, the Mali Trepelit and the Mali Trebeshines and introducing three "much extended flanks" on the left of the troops of the Osum fields (ridge of the Tomori), Deshnices (run of the Osum, from Krepska to Bregu the Valasit) and Dhrinos-Zagorias (ridge of the Mali Trebeshines). The possibility for the Greeks derived some, to use it is concern to us of the salient in order to head at Berat and on the Vojussa to the valley of Tepeleni is the foretold "flanks" for falling on the back of the contiguous alignments.

On the other hand the information signaled: predispositions of attack on the right of the Tomorreces (the Greek V Corps is prepared,

22) Cavallero diary, date 19.1.1941.

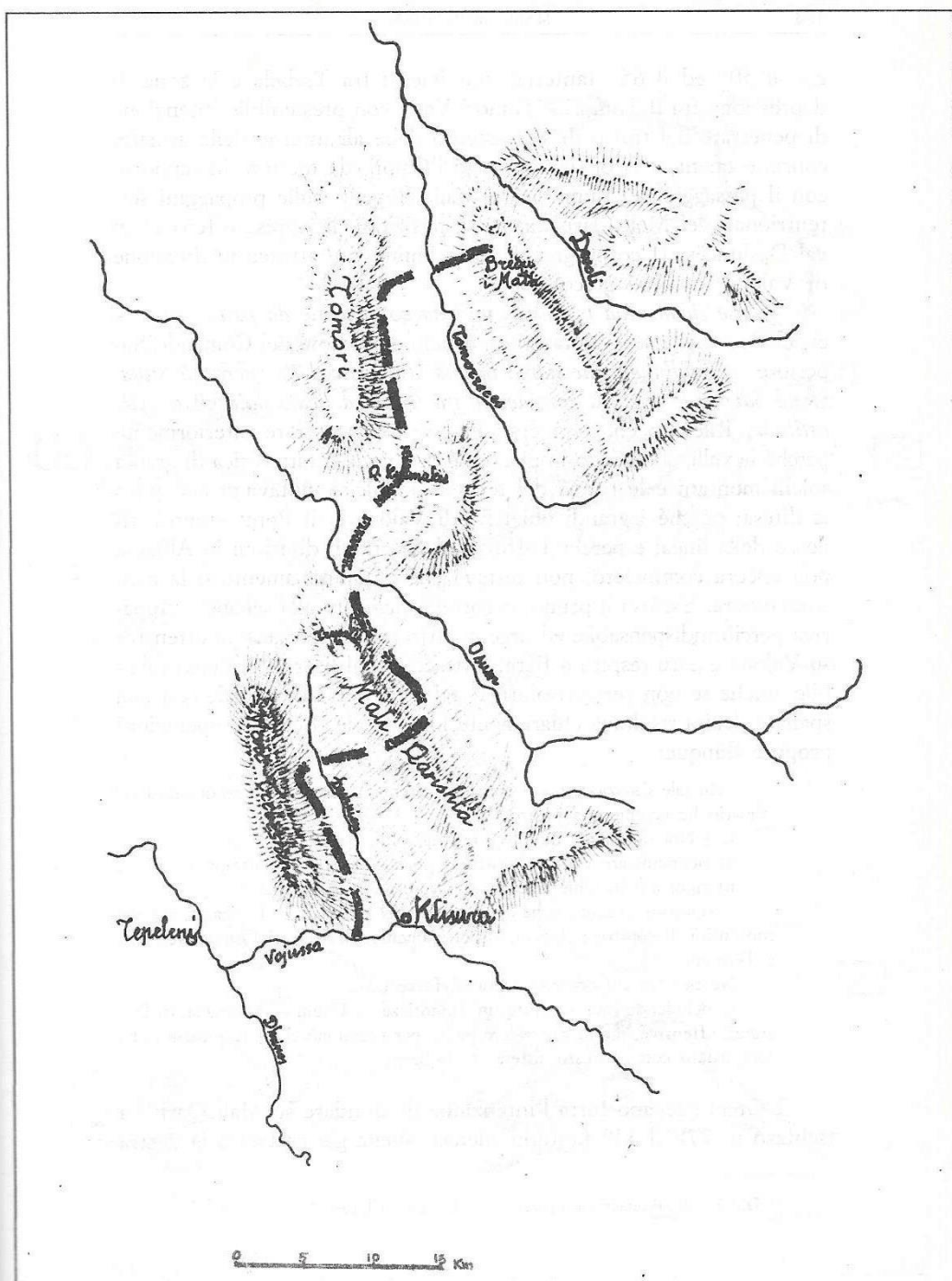
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 457

The situation on the front of Berat after the fall of Klisura (14 January)

Schizzo n. 76

LA SITUAZIONE SUL FRONTE BERAT DOPO LA CADUTA DI KLISURA (14 GENNAIO)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

with the 30th and the 65th infantry); movements between Trebela and the zone of depression between the Tomori and Tomori Varr, with presumable intention to penetrate in the feature of stagger of the inner wings of the armies; concentrations and recognitions along the Osum, to put in relationship with the passage of the river towards Mali Trepelit, on the northern layers of the Mali Qarishta; predispositions of offensive resumption in val Deshincës (Greek II Corps); strongly imminent attack in direction of Valona (Greek I Corps).

"Perhaps we are to the eve of a general attack from the Greek side - the operations section of the Comando Superiore concluded in its appraisal - undoubtedly we are in a acute phase of the war; the situation today is indeed to consider between most delicate from the beginning of the hostilities". Found that it was no more possible to withdraw further because the valleys, ending up in plan, they lost the characteristic of large mountainous furrows and the sweetened shapes of the land helped the defense very little; because the great objective of Valona and Berat they were to shelter of the line; and because the in flow of the great divisions in Albania not still begun, it did not remain that the collision or the counter maneuver. Excluded the first one, it was necessary to resort to the second one. Urgent appeared therefore indispensable and to hurry the offensive planned on Valona and to give breath to Berat. To attack on the shoreline what was feasible, even if not sure decisive; to act in the center field with the shoulders a decided clearly impossible result. The operations section proposed therefore:

"In such situation not there is that a system: to repeat backwards how much the adversary has completed to our damage.

(...) We must therefore to our time:

- a) to retake at drawn the feature the right ridge Tomorizza;
- b) to bring back the alignment in Osum to Ciafa Devris;
- c) to bring back the occupation of the ridge of the Chiarista to Topajanit, that will allow to cover the flanks, respective, of the fields Osum, Desnizza and Tepeleni.

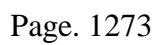
Neither in order to make that great forces are necessary (...).

Concluding: not dealing with, in Tomorizza - Osum - Desnizza, to make great offensives, but to resume piece for piece that that the adversary has conquered with the same system (...)"⁽²³⁾.

The Greeks had all the intention to smash in on Mali Qarishta (sketch n. 77): the 33rd Greek infantry had already forced the right

23) DSCSFAA, operating Memorandum n. 3, dated 14.1.1941.

LA SITUAZIONE FRA OSUM E VOJUSSA IL 14 GENNAIO



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of the *Trento* Bn. and to withdraw and an attack immediately delivered on the flank, from the height, two battalions of the *Lupi* had hit against one offensive resumption of all the 15th Inf. Div., such that after hard fight the action had grown fainter to night fall of 15 January with the *Lupi* rejected on the summit of the Mali Tabajan. Gen. Mercalli ordered to the then Gen. Bollea to carry out a determined and decided effort to the first lights of the following day, in order to consolidate the possession of Mali Tabajan and its southern and north-east layers and in order to restore the sure connection with the *Trento* Bn.. The operation had to receive the competition of the aviation, of which it had been asked the participation on the southern slopes for the mount and on the front Rodin-Mali Taronine-Prichta, and had been conceived in the picture of the directives given by Gen. Geloso. But the counterattack did not have place. Of the par the air support for the bad atmospheric conditions did not have place. That morning the Greek 15th Inf. Div. left again to the attack and the *Lupi* did not resist. While the *Trento* Bn. tried to facilitate the resumption of the tactical communication, the 77th infantry, subordinate to most violent fire of artillery and mortaring and hardly chased, it came rejected in disorder from the positions of Çuka Fecit towards the basin of Kajca. The rapidity of carrying out itself of the events and the interruption of the communications made that the Commander of the IV Corps remained for various hours lacking in news. When, at 16:30, Gen. Girotti communicated:

"This enemy morning has attacked between Tabajan and Çuka Fecit & has occupied Çuka Fecit basin from where it has swept up also my left wing (hill 1049) & has taken on the flank all the *Julia* alignment stop In this moment with the collected alpine elements is being attempted for the slopes of Drass and Cais to resume hill 1066 of the basin of Çuka Fecit, also not being it in the field of the division stop It is not possible to hold basin Çuka Fecit without possession Mali Tabajan & analogous it is difficult to hold hill 817 without possession basin Çuka Fecit ",

Gen. Mercalli replied with absolute conviction that it had to be a matter of an error because "*the 77th infantry with its three battalions holds Çuka Fecit securely*". Unfortunately soon after, a message of the *Lupi* arrived - sent in the morning and addressed to the Commander of the *Bari* for the continuation to the army corps, not achievable directly - which it confirmed the fall of the position and the folding of the units:

"Enemy it has attacked in force sutura between 77th & 78th to hill 990 on the basin that from Drass and Cais it comes down to Caizza has smashed in threatening of encircling in total the 77th & consequently the *Julia* & the *Bari* stop the 78th uncovered

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

on the left in as much as does not exist the *Trento* battalion reduced to a few men (...) stop the most serious situation ".

Later, the *Julia* was reiterating the news, adding: "*no counterattack is marked successful stop situation is ever precarious how much for the dominion that the enemy inhibit on our location*". The historical diary of IV Corps Commander brings:

"The day marked the definitive regression of the *Lupi* division under the continuous enemy pressure. The defense of Chiaf and Sofiut does not resist and all the defensive complex expedient on the line Mali Spadarit -Chiaf and Murit- ridge of Spi Zapopei. It arrived the 11th to Commander of the C.A. Gen. Geloso, who orders Gen. Mercalli to go in the locality of Bubesi in order to take more direct contact with the situation and to circulate the consequent orders".

Bubesi arriving with a long march by muddy mule track, and seen the state of the things, Gen. Mercalli arranged for the immediate reorganization of the units during the night and for theirs resumption to the hand. But the *Lupi di Toscana* was not more employable. It was be a matter of the third disappointment in a few days and it could not weigh on the spirit of all, much more than also for the *Julia* it was necessary to correct the course of the line, conserving however the connection with the 31st infantry despite the Greek efforts in order to be useful for the moment favorable. Naturally - to part a hardest comment of Geloso - these events induced to adequate measures. The first and more urgent regarded the review of the device to leave from the same day. The IV Corps assumed the field from the Osum to the ridge between Osum and Deshnices, with the divisions *Pusteria* ⁽²⁴⁾, *Julia* and *Lupi*; the VIII Corps, also continuing to control the line of the strong point garrisons from the *Pinerolo*, taken the responsibility of the new field of the lower Deshnices valley, with *Bari*, *Siena* and *Pinerolo*.

Therefore they followed the dispositions for the conduct of the combat: the IV Corps received order to maintain the alignments unchanged and attitude on the right of the Osum, where the occupied positions have to be defended to the end and to guarantee until to the extreme sacrifice some positions on the right of the water course, between the ridge of Veresha and Chiaf and Sofiut. The VIII Corps had the task to hold the wide semicircle from the western slopes of Chiaf and Sofjut to hill 1308, extreme north of Mali Trebeshines. One was nearly with the shoulders to the wall.

24) On 14 January Gen. Esposito had replaced Gen. De Cia in the command of the *Pusteria* division.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

3. THE CONTROL ON THE BERAT FRONT.

On 18 January Cavallero went to Berat in order to confer with Geloso. Mussolini had made it known, through Col. Bartiromo, that *"he must counterattack, to break off this spell that for 90 days it makes us to lose land position by position. Therefore we will find ourselves to the sea and not there will be more positions! The Greeks will reach Skumbi to which they stretch"*⁽²⁵⁾, nearly that from three months the commanders of the Army in any case did not try to resume breath. gen. Spicacci, head of G.S. of the 9th Army, had communicated that all the bridges on the Devoli, the Verçes and the Tomorreces had been carried away via from the flood and that therefore literally became impossible to attack: it was necessary to restore them, but in order to make that had that the torments he was awaiting. Balanced on the provisions in course of performance near the 11th Army, Cavallero specified that the ulterior employment of the forces that had been made available had to be oriented everywhere, but in particular in the field of Berat, to the decided that always possible counterattack with maneuver concept; and that the previewed counterattack from Tepeleni in Klisura direction convene was put into effect not hardly ready, where, of course, the climatic conditions allowed. As far as the offensive of Valona, in spite of the mortgage on the use of the *Legnano*, the predispositions had to be maintained integral, in order to execute the operation at the opportune moment.

The more urgent issues - for the left of the 11th Army were two: to re-establish a position of resistance of sufficient robustness in order to resist the continuation of the Greek effort and to supply to the reordering of the major unit. With respect to the first point, first of all it was suspended and then at once sent back to other time the programmed offensive for the special Corps; therefore it was passed to the control of the Greek maneuver.

The zone in which the fight was being moved is characterized from the *chain of the Mali*, a long ridge whose line of crest has a medium altitude of the 1,200 meters: Mali Trepelit - Mali Spadarit - Mali Nemulasit - Mali Corap - Mali Tabajan - Mali Qarishta. The chain of the Mali separated the valleys of the Osum from that one of the Deshnicës. The riser of Bregu Shalesit, comprised between Chiaf and Bubesit and Chiaf Chiciocut, determines the head of the Deshnicës valley and constitute the more delicate features of the front. In fact the Greek efforts was directed in those days

25) Cavallero diary, date 18.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

against Chiaf and Sofiut and Chiaf and Lusit, the shoulder of the riser in argument is worth to say the positions of the first line of contact (sketch n. 78).

The Comando Superiore Albania Armed Forces circulated the 19th directives n. 11 ⁽²⁶⁾, assigning to the army - beyond to the *Pinerolo* (Gen. De Stefanis) and to the reconstituted *Siena* (Gen. Carta) - the division *Cacciatori delle Alpi* (Gen. Pivano), in course of concentration in the plain of Berat, and the *Cervino* Bn., just disembarked. Held account of these it reinforces, the 11th Army had to assure the organization and the garrison of the strong points and to bring back in ahead to the more soon alignment, by means of an emphasized staggering in depth that concurred to counterattack the adversary, repelling the enemy and earning land: what most important and urgent.

That fact, was necessary to withdraw from the line the residual elements of the divisions *Julia*, *Bari*, *Lupi di Toscana* and smaller units, in order to confer greater compactness to the alignment and to begin the reorganization of tried major units.

On 21 January the situation in short saw a contact line, to which the units of the IV Corps of Mercalli were leaned in an sensitive intermingling and those of the VIII Corps of Bancale; a rear defensive position, on which they were in preparation course strong points sent; a doubling line, even punctuated it from previewed strong points...

The IV Corps (sketch n. 79) it was constituted from the *Punteria*, from the *Cacciatori*, from the *Julia* and from the *Lupi*, then, to the practical action, it was only the *Pusteria* to hold the entire forehead, with the 7th alpine of the *Tomori* to the Osum and with the 11th alpine (battalions *Bassano*, *Trento* and *Val Chiese*, one of the complements of the 139th Inf. and one of formation of the 78th Inf.) from Osum to Chiaf and Sofiut. The *Cacciatori* still had 52nd Inf. on the Mali Trepelit and 51st Inf. in the zone of Paraboar. The *Julia*, reduced to a regiment with three small battalions, was in course of collection at Hani Bubesit. The *Lupi*, to part the battalion of formation of the 78th Inf. online, had re-united its remains, approximately 800 men, also at Hani Bubesit in the high Deshnicës valley. Its head of the G.S., that he had received the task to care personally the reorder of the unit, in one long relation addressed to Gen. Carta put in evidence the state of lack of will power, the lack of reactivity of the mass of the soldiers (reduced in most deplorable conditions of clothing and equipment), which not ,

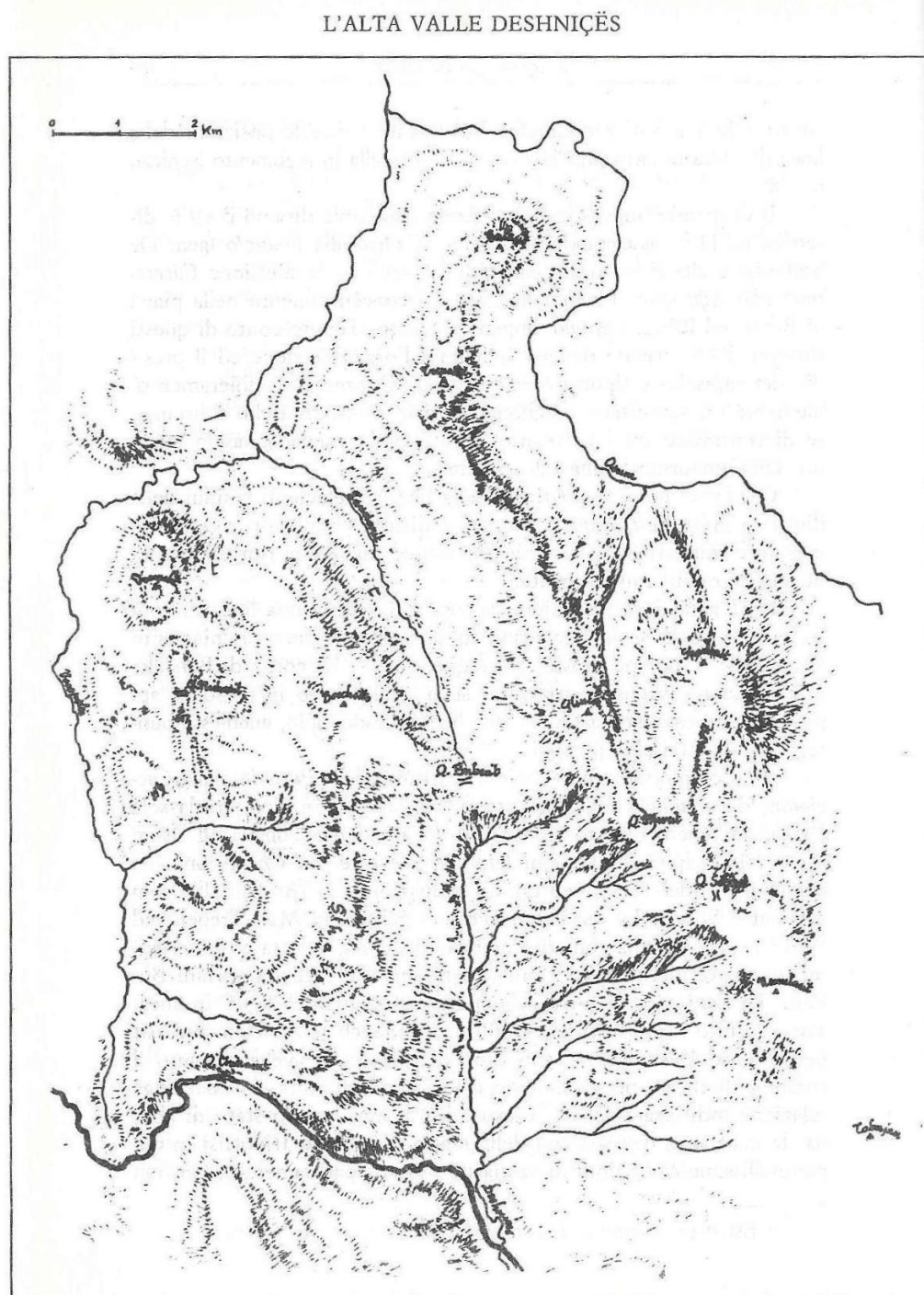
26)DSCSFAA, f. 0950/op. dated. 20.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 464

The morphologic Outline of the Deshnicës valley

Schizzo n. 78



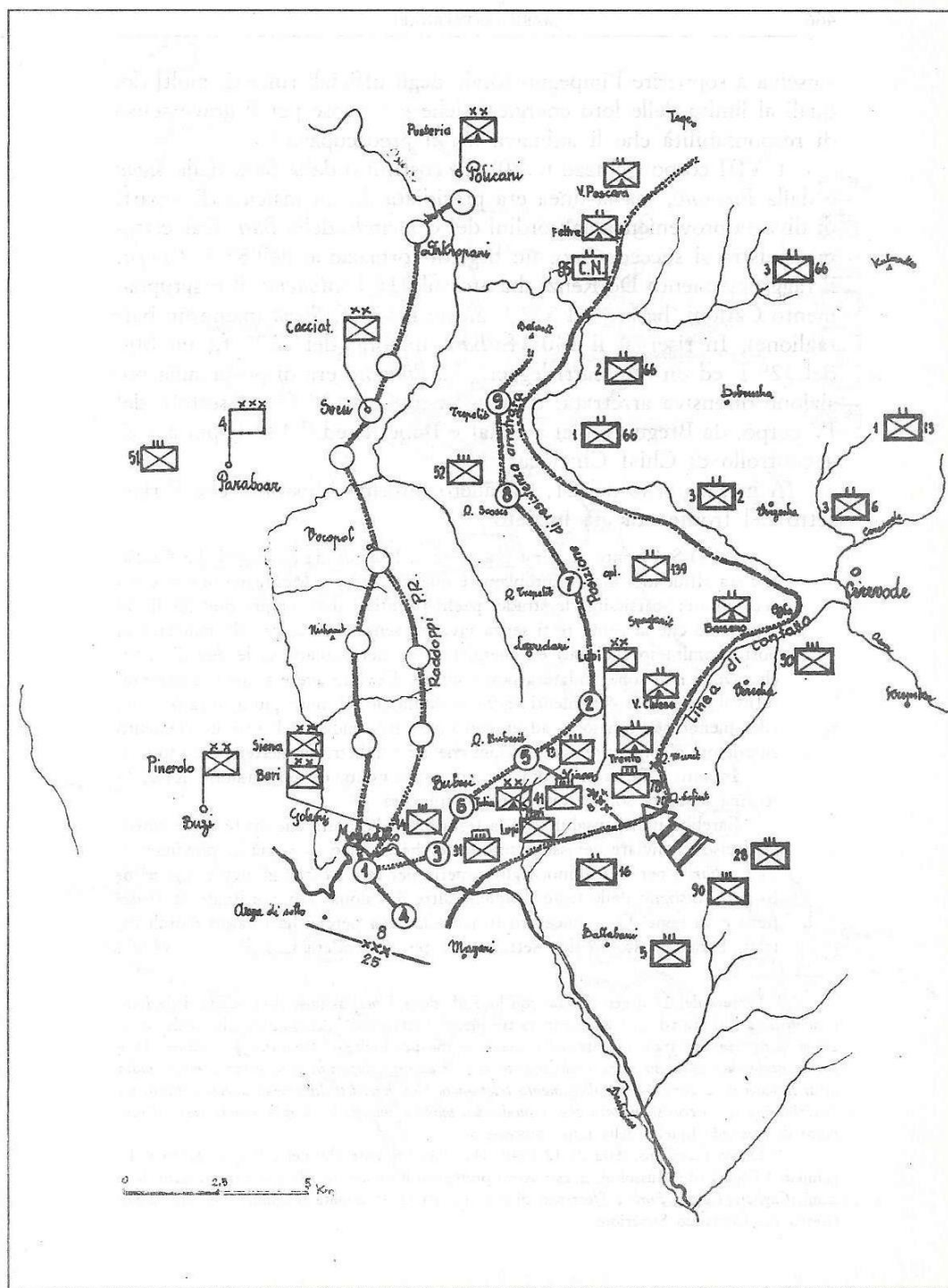
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 465

The alignment of the IV and VIII army corps on 21 January

Schizzo n. 79

LO SCHIERAMENTO DEL IV E DELL'VIII CORPO IL 21 GENNAIO



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

it succeeded to satisfy the total engagement of the remaining officers, many of which to the limit of their physical energies and nervous for the serious sense of responsibility that animated them but he took care of them⁽²⁷⁾.

The VIII Corps (sketch n. 80) was constituted by the *Bari*, the *Siena* and the *Pinerolo*, but the line was garrisoned from with of units of various origin under the orders of the Commander of the *Bari*. From the left extreme they were succeeded: a Bn. of formation of the 8th Inf. *Cuneo*; the grouping *De Renzi*, based on the 41st Inf. *Modena*; the *Carlioni* grouping, based on the 31st Inf. *Siena*; the 32nd Inf. *Siena* (less a battalion). In reservoir: 140th Inf. *Bari*, a Bn. of the 139th Inf., a Bn. of the 32nd Inf. and Bn. light tanks. The *Pinerolo* was disposed on the rear defensive position, and just: the 13th Inf. in the field of the IV Corps, from Bregu Gliulei to Chiaf and Bubesit, and the 14th Inf. more to south, control of Chiaf Chiciocut.

At noon of the 21st, Cavallero informed Mussolini that the rearrangement of the front already was begun:

"(...) On the front of Berat he is to place the *Pinerolo* for three days. The *Cacciatori* are flowing. Large problem is the logistical one. Not high but uneven mountains; most insufficient the roads: the few paths not always practicable. There is danger that people remain without provisions and ammunitions. I have sent in place men specialized and energetic. Not to be astonished if the two divisions that I had have gone to endured place. They must have all being necessary, all the necessary, otherwise go to rack and ruin. The more advanced wall holds, fulfilling its function, to a sure moment will let go. And only an retarding element to allow to the divisions that are behind to put themselves to place (...).

While to Berat works for a solid wall, a little behind perhaps, he knows, but the solid units are to place only now.

It would be indispensable that the head of those units that you have kindly decided to send came at once because the others are already in motion.

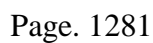
The *Cagliari* is for Vercellino. It waits for it in order to make that that you have suggested to it.

I would have need of the witness of those others at Valona. I have reordered the *Siena*; it holds and it goes well. Now I concentrate all on the *Julia* because it has the intact moral values. It will be in place in two weeks and then it will resume (...)"⁽²⁸⁾.

27) The evening of the 17th gen. Carta, with the G.S. of the *Siena*, assumed the command of the *Lupi* and the *Julia* (reduced to a regiment with three small battalions). For giving to an idea of the situation filler a phrase begins them of the relation that then forwarded: "*For all that day 18th and the successive night I was without connection with the higher authorities because without some means radio telephone link was found some in the zone. With the employee units was having established a service of correspondence positions that was loosing as my march towards my place of command [that one of the Lupi] proceeded*".

28) Cavallero diary, date 21.12.1940. To keep in mind whom in the had talk 14 January at Foggia with Mussolini, these he had promised to send in Albania another four divisions (*Cagliari*, *Casa*, *Forlì* and *Sforzesca*) of which one for the 9th Army (to *Cagliari*) and the others as reserve with the Comando Superiore.

LO SCHIERAMENTO DELL'VIII E DEL XXV CORPO IL 21 GENNAIO



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

In the talk a reassuring "intention" is clearly observed. But the strategic panorama was effectively less dark than as much as it can be thought. The presence of a crisis moment turned out obvious - than, in depth, it was begun at Kalamas - but throwing a look in the rears, where the units in reconstitution were being collected, and knowing of the predispositions in course for the transport in Albania of numerous battalions of complements, it was lawful a moderated optimism. Less comprehensible the haste appears to employ the "head" of the divisions, although by now it was incontrovertible that their entrance in action ended for translated into reinforcements sometimes fictitious and in harmful loss of confidence of the units in if same. But another element emerges in the telephone conversation: "*Discourses in the Commands?*" - Cavallero to a question mark of Mussolini repeats - *it does not turn out to me. I know the atmosphere: it is worked, been clear. I push with all the energies* ". Instead the things they were not exactly therefore: it will be returned on the subject.

The evening of 22 January the Greek pressure, rejected the troops of *Bari*, came to contact with the three strong points that blocked Chiaf and Chiciocut. On all the arc from Mt. Groppa (Southeastern slopes of the Trebeshines) to the Osum the fight was carried out heated. Series of repeated attacks against key positions or stiff local infiltrations could not be spoken of a general offensive, but about one to take advantage of the favorable occasions. Chiaf Sofiut and the ridge of Calà, in the sector of the IV Corps, was theatre of alternate vicissitudes, but, all adding, those drawn could in sure way to be considered zone of safety regarding the defense in via of preparation. The speech changed on the Trebeshines since the Greek 1st Inf. Div. was strained to conquer Chiaf Lusit and hill 1308 of the Trebeshines. It succeeded to you, after many empty attempts, blowing up the joint between the VIII and IV Corps and just when, seen persisting of the attacks in correspondence of those drawn, Gen. Geloso had established to assign to *Cacciatori* also the garrison of the strong point of Bregu Gliulei and Chiaf Bubesit on the rear position and to make available therefore the 13th infantry of the *Pinerolo* for the shoring up of hill 1308. The arrival of the Greeks on Mali Trebeshines was decidedly worrisome. On this chain the XXV Corps had sent to equal forces altogether to seven alpine companies (*Val Cismon* Bn. and *Cervino* skiers Bn.) which, reached Chiaf Mezgoranit and spreading themselves on the crest line and controlling, with the conquest of a dominant height, Mt. Groppa, succeeded to make useless every Greek installment. Then for the northern part of the chain

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

it was too much late: hill 1308, the summit of the Trebeshines had fallen. The decision to retake it was immediate and the realization came entrusted to the I/14th with two companies and good support of fire. The first impulse was happy, since the unit succeeded in the attempt, but a violent Greek reaction, in the course of which the Bn. commander and one of the coy. commanders of fell, forced the attackers to leave the ground and to withdraw. To resolve the situation it was destined the counter maneuver of Klisura to work of the XXV Corps, whose beginning was established for the dawn of the 25th.

In concomitance to Geloso it had prescribed to his left wing to couple, to disturb, to confuse the adversary with intense vigorous offensive activity of artillery and aiming in the more sensitive directions. It had moreover to be kept ready to attack as soon as the success had been delineated on Klisura. In particular, in the sector of the IV Corps, the *Pusteria* was in charge to move towards Q. Kulmakes; the *Cacciatori* to assume one concentrated alignment to astride of spur the Bregu Gliulei-Chiaf Bubesit, such to guarantee the doubling line and to concur a resumption counter-offensive towards Q. Sofiut - Mali Tabajan. A task, this of the *Cacciatori*, that it well remembered that one entrusted opportunely to the *Lupi di Toscana*. At the same time, in the sector of the VIII Corps, the *Pinerolo* had to attack the positions to astride of the Deshnicës, the height of Hani Balaban, in order to eliminate the pressure on Chiaf Chiciocut and to possibly reach the Suka-Podgorani alignment.

Both the actions lacked the scope. The IV Corps was anticipated from the Greek 15th Inf. Div. and invested with violence on Bregu Gliulei - Mali Spadarit for defective execution of the operation of substitution of the II/13th on the Chiaf and Murit: the 52nd infantry, picked of surprise in phase of arrangement, driven out of Bregu Gliulei towards Vendresha but it succeeded to hold Chiaf Bubesit, while the 11th alpine became stiff on Mali Spadarit. Also the counterattack predisposed from the 51st did not succeed to come true itself because of the continuity of the Greek effort:

"(...) Attack to the enemy in depth - Gen Mercalli telegraphed to the Commander of the Army - & unprepared *Cacciatori* division surprised in flagrant passage from, defensive alignment on rear position to offensive alignment, have threatened to shatter the *Cacciatori* division (...)"

Mercalli was very aware of what a lot could happen if a gash in the device had been produced, that while he ordered to the commander of the *Cacciatori* to re-establish the line with the 51st

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

and the 11th alpine, for every eventuality said to the *Pusteria* of hold out in the conditions for crossing the Osum with a share of its forces, in order to operate from the ridge of Bregu Valasit on the flank of the adversary who by chance was successful to put foot on Mali Trepelit in order to continue directly on Paraboar. Skimming the daily histories of the interested Commands it hits following itself of urging and of incentives to the *Cacciatori*, under all the forms, for resolute counterattacks. On the evening of the 28th Gen. Mercalli wrote: "*also today is a day ending without success stop to try all with every effort that one of tomorrow is finally profitable until the objective attack of three days of combat of Bregu Gliulei (...)*" (29). But the successive day had to unwillingly admit that the orders were not enough to modify determine - and sadly notices - inconvenient inborn in the hurried employment of divisions still very hastily mobilized: "*Division tomorrow attends to reorganize & to return completely operating in the hands of the leaders, limiting itself to hold positions puts into effect (...)*" (30). At the end of the month the IV Corps was withdrawn on the position of rear resistance and the front of the *Cacciatori* turned out divided into two by the Greek presence at Bregu Gliulei (sketch n. 81).

In the sector of the VIII Corps the things had not turned out much better, even if with much inferior damages. The attack of the *Pinerolo* had to be carried out with two columns. On the left (col. De Renzi), the rests of the tactical group De Renzi (31), the II/14th and the III/13th; to right (col. Barone), the 141st and 136th cc.nn. Bns. with accompaniment unit.

Moreover a tactical group of a pair of companies, with the competition of a alpine company from other direction, had to resume hill 1308 of Mali Trebeshines. The *Siena* would remain in the second formation. The order was circulated at 02:30 of 25 January. The beginning of the attack was established for 07:00 hours of that morning.

In truth nothing went right. The right column not move because the 136th cc.nn. Bn, that night had to flow in, it was not introduced that in the afternoon of the 25th. The right column did not leave for reasons that were only known at 16:00 of the 25th, when it was possible to resume the interrupted radio contact:

29) DS Commander IV Army Corps, tele 01/F/71! date 28.1.1941.

30) Ibid, tele 01/F;713 dated 29.1.1941.

31) Constituted from how much infantry remained of the 41st and two bersaglieres Bns.. The grouping, after the regression of the *Julia* and the *Lupi* had been brought back to Bregu Shalesit.

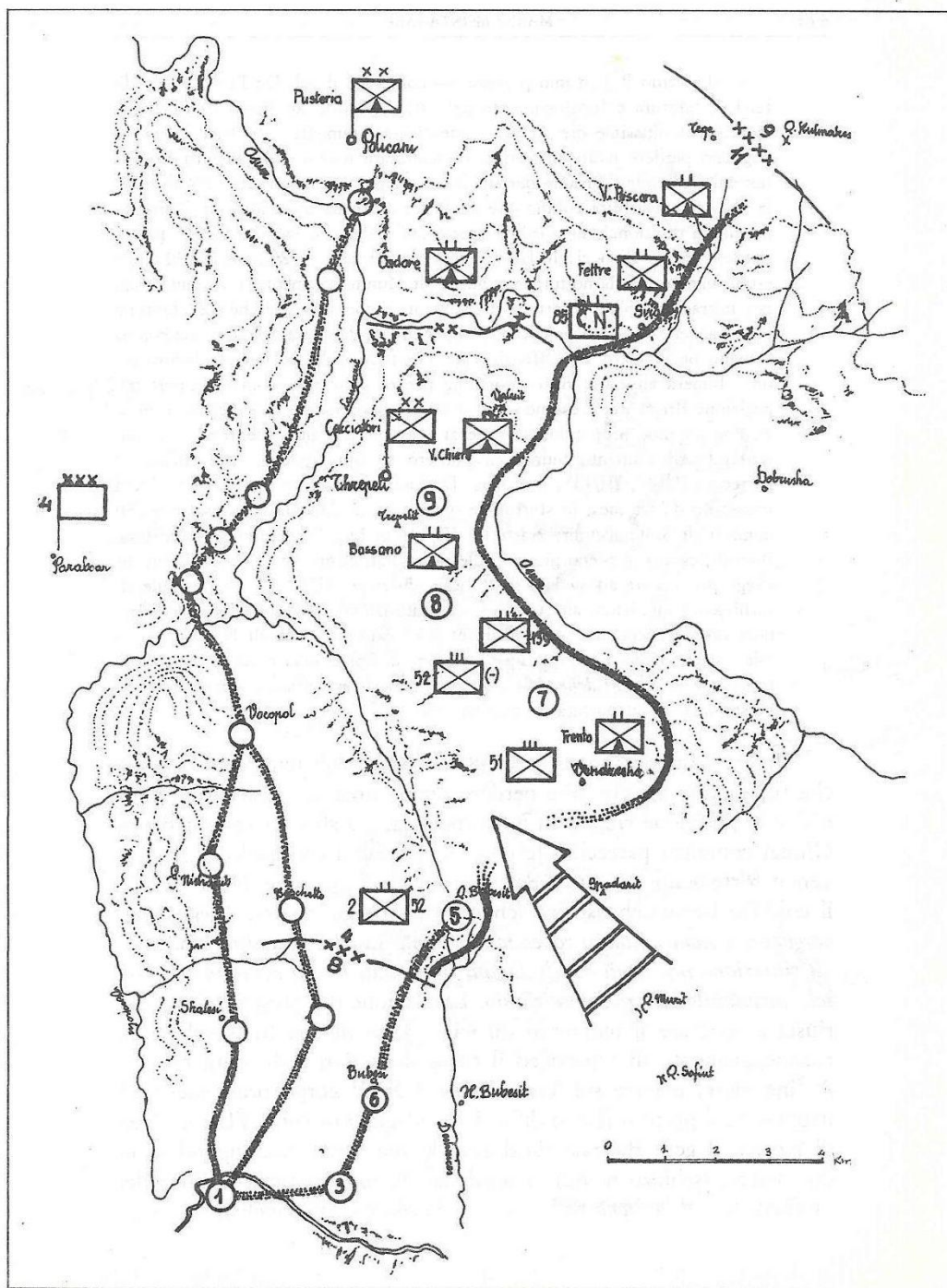
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 471

The alignment with the IV army corps on 31 January

Schizzo n. 81

LO SCHIERAMENTO DEL IV CORPO IL 31 GENNAIO



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"The R.3 radio in my possession - it communicated Col. De Renzi - it has calibration defects and operation of the all uncertain stop Pauses of operation of very many hours stop Movements absolutely forbid if many hours are not wanted to be lost before realizing new connection stop Already known to the Commander *Bari* division stop My patrol O.C. with unusable radio needs to replace cowlings batteries stop Already reported for two days at division artillery Command stop Order operations that Command n. 144 sent 15:00 hours stop III/13th infantry today arrived hill 802 at 15:30 hours after exhausting diurnal & nocturnal march stop only has of three hundred rounds for machine-guns stop Ulterior supply impossible because 12th infantry lacking baggage train stop No shells for 45mm mortars stop Only one hand grenade per soldier stop Offensive for Suka objective in such conditions is a chimera stop I will make instead possible in order to tomorrow retake important position Bregu Rapi being I must proportion objectives to means, not being able proportion means to objectives stop Introducing itself and allow supply ammunitions I will aim at Spi Comarate stop To the action participates II/14th, III/13th, bers. De Laurentis Bn., wreckage of the bers. Guidani Bn. employed from three months in ill-fated operations in Albania forces today 280 men, stop On dark will transfer III/13th & De Laurentis Bn. on ridge Bubesit, shaved in broad daylight from the Greek machine-guns of Bregu Rapi stop Ask to supply to start on Bubesit provisions for III/13th & if possible ammunitions supplies stop Attends for radio through *Bari* division tomorrow note confirmation order operations in order & offensive hour beginning stop News on enemy: today the Greeks have occupied ridge of Spi Gliulei over coming weak resistance *Cacciatori delle Alpi* stop Chiaf Bubesit is by now dominated of opposing & to its capacity of hand ".

Finally the action against hill 1308 met with a assault Greek that was rejected but that it made to lose precious time so that after all the position remained in enemy hand. The breakthrough to Bregu Gliulei complicated much the things when the strong point of Bubesit came strongly invested from east and the northeast. At 16:30 of the 26th Col. De Renzi, that had been deployed on Bregu Shalesit, signaled:

"checked attack with difficulty turning upside down the front on hill 802 of Bregu Shalesit stop indefensible situation stop give me immediate orders stop tomorrow retreat unavoidable stop lacking ammunitions ". The reaction of the garrison of Bubesit succeeded to exceed the difficult moment, after of that a adaptation of units and the withdrawal of the *Bari* and of smaller units was possible.

At the end of the month, while on the Trebeshines the XXV Corps supplied to strengthen own defensive flank being connected with the VIII to Arza of means, gen. Bancale reordered his forces subdividing them into two fields (sketch n. 82): to north, the *Pinerolo* on all the line of the strong points, to south the *Siena* in the "zone of the Arze", that is that area to noon

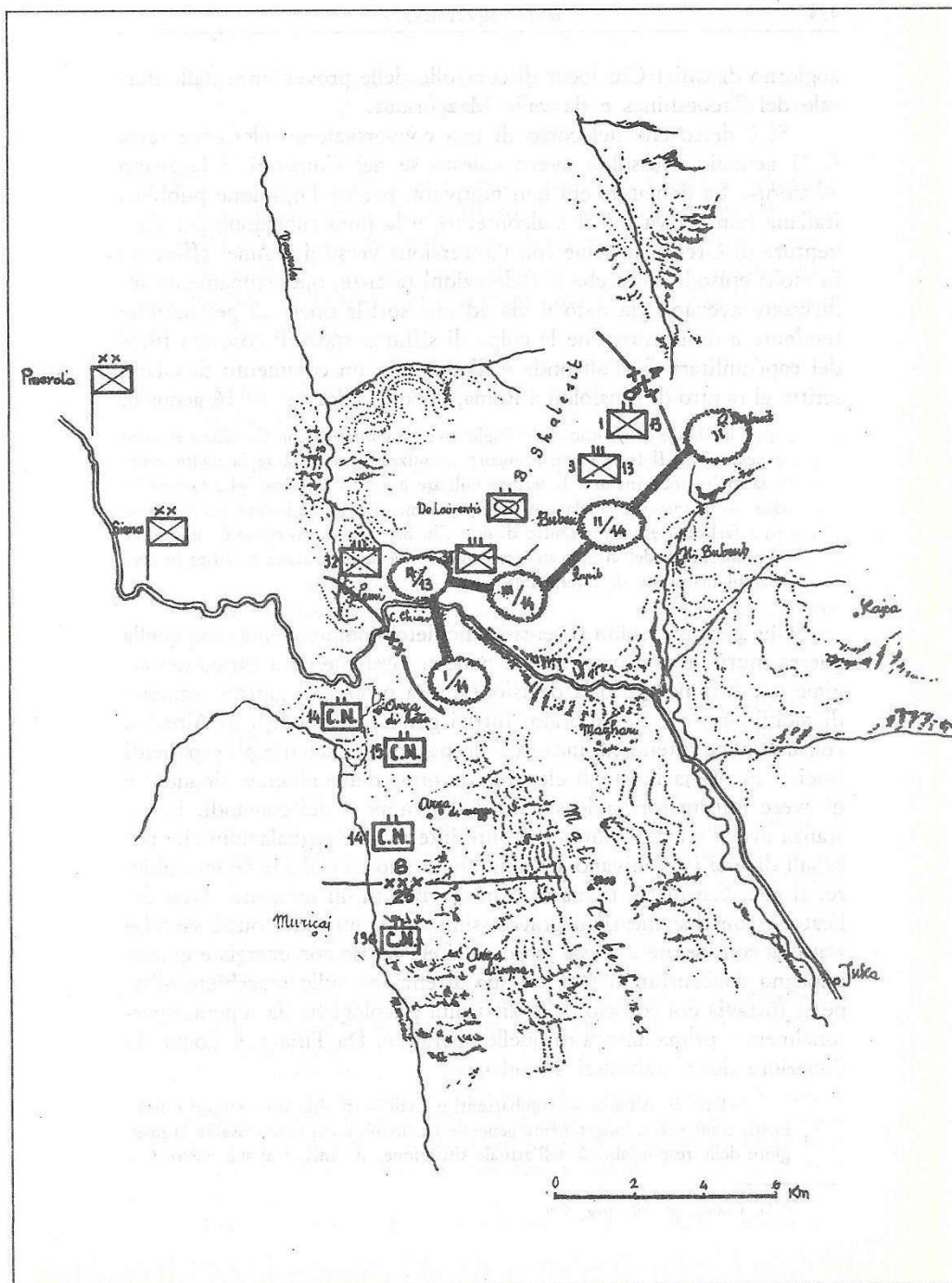
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 473

The alignment with the VIII army corps on 31 January

Schizzo n. 82

LO SCHIERAMENTO DELL'VIII CORPO IL 31 GENNAIO



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of Chiaf Chiciocut of control of the origins from the ridge of the Trebeshines and from the Mezgoranit valley.

It has been said that in the course of a telephone conversation made on 21 January Mussolini had asked if in the Commanders "speeches" were made. The question very was motivated, because Italian public opinion did not hide more the dissatisfaction, and the worry for the adventure of Greece, with the aversion towards the regimen, emerged in many episodes so much that the fascist federations, opportunely addressed had already given the way to a subtle work of tending persuasion to demonstrate that the guilt of such state of things was all of the military leaders. And however a comment of Ciano written is illuminant to the return of Mussolini to Rome, after the talk of 16 January.

"The Duce on return from Puglie where has conferred with Cavallero is dark and pessimist. The front still is not stabilized, although much people and a lot stuff sent. The military sector is failed in full load. "Greece says has been a masterpiece political; we are resolutions to isolate this country and to make to only strike against us. Who has lacked in full load is the army ". He is taken care of the travel in Germany: he feels to introduce himself to Hitler in manifest conditions of inferiority"⁽³²⁾.

That but Mussolini was felt restless, comprising that that useless and prepared war was not placed entire to burden of his regimen, is to demonstrate it to the taken decision just the day following of mobilize, on 1 February, all the hierarchy and sending them to Albania, with the triple attempt propagandistly to show the fascist exponents in front line, to elevate the "tone" of the Albanian atmosphere and having informers on the spirit of the troops and the commanders. In short "he had recognized" the inner forehead. The signaling that for various channels reached Rome were not consoling some to flattering. Gen. Cavallero, recalled in service in a very delicate moment and with the two most onerous assignments - each of which would have been to consider to full time - had moved with energy and great engagement concentrating all his attention on the Albanian theater, however he was conscious of the psychological difficulties to exceed personally, before still of those operating ones. From Tirana, the Comando Superiore of the Carabinieri signaled:

"All in Albania - combatant and civil - are asked, astonished and indignant, as ever the deputy general Jacomoni, to which they make to go back the greater one of the responsibilities of puts into effect them situation, it is still to its place. That

32) G. CIANO, op. cit., page 499.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

that it has not rendered not appreciate the presence of Gen. Cavallero, also recognizing of the merits. Also the organization of the Party in Albania and many bigwigs wish to leave (...)⁽³³⁾.

To mid January, after the loss of Klisura, the dissatisfaction for the course of the fight much was diffused. Two documents, written in that period by persons in a position to possessing a complete panorama exist. The first one reflects a political point of view of inner and is constituted from a letter that the Inspector of the P.N.F., Parini, sent to Ciano 18 January:

The vicissitudes of the war in Albania have not still given the sign of a decided improvement and they are lived, to more or less long intervals, days of anguish.

Cavallero makes of the admirable efforts and succeeds to instill in the others the confidence that every spirit his gesture or word or provision, but appears clearly that the instrument with which acts, and that is the army, is still full of above all moral deficiencies. Moral resistance that is character, there is not always little in the units also of recent arrival and that also they have good warlike traditions. The dead spot of the disheartenment crisis that seems to take every combatant when it disembarks in Albania (than in this week is rainy, snowy and muddy in an improbable way) still is not exceeded. If then, after a few days or a few hours that the unit is disembarked, it comes started on the combat, the depression produces serious effects and therefore they are continued to lose ridges, valley and villages that also would appear of easy defense. Creed that all would proceed better if the units could be withholdings for some time in barracks of the rears before being starting on the front, so as to get a little used with this nature therefore cheerful, but I know very well that up to now it has not been possible for the defensive requirements.

But this my letter to You has nearly the office of a conscience drainage and its goal is above all of make you present that the state of mind of the senior officer corps, in its whole, and of the Commands is not at all online with the situation. There is in they, and to begin from they, a sense of singular giving up, like if it were be a matter of people gained from the destiny.

Noted clearly the tendency to justify the deficient or quite nonexistent reaction to states of fact, than also could be improved, with digressions in the political field. Many information confirm that too much it is discussed and critical in these atmospheres, where the combatant would have to be the only and absolute anxiety of the 24 hours, on the goals, the justice and the possibilities of our war.

All are nervous and of bad humor in the Commands, and the preferred vent is that one to criticize also in way malevolent men and systems of politics. The factious bottom that is in the mind of every Italian is bringing up also in these atmospheres that also would have are of rigorously immune. It is hardly the case to say that this state of mind diffused in the Commands has effects

33) Report forwarded to the Ministry of the War - Cabinet at the end of December.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

deleterious on the troops that are already potentially disposed to let to go to the disheartenment (...).

It would be, to my warning, extremely dangerous if from our part a such marked situation while it is in full development. It is necessary to repair without to mark the points because it must be very soon, in one way or the other, to carry all to make just the duty. What that today still does not happen. But the truth, and that that is must also have in mind always the crisis is not simple and that we will be responsible of injure - Fascism if it will come forgotten when it will be exceeded (...)."

The Party is making of its best in order to make to feel his presence to the troops (...). The physical presence of many elements of the Party contributes also to render the Commandos more prudent because the troops are very sensitive to the shapes of direct attendance. All it is made, in short, in order to determine the moral resumption, but the coldness of the High Commands is of record.

Optimal to this effect come Ricci, Cianetti, Bottai, Rossi - Passavanti, because they serve to giving a new feeling to the Commands and rectifying in them sure illusions of "languidly" fascist that had been cultivated here and here".

According to document it has rigorously military character: draft of the appreciation of the situation completed from the intelligence of Tirana and given, with the consent of Gen. Cavallero, to Gen. Pricolo, who had to report to Mussolini personally:

"(...) Our situation.

1. Situation and alignment of our forces.

At the beginning of operations they were in Albania 8 divisions more a quick grouping. On the whole approximately 80,000 men. To the date of the 10 current, the total force has increased to a total of approximately 300,000 men, among which 12,000 officers (...). Numerically the Italian regiments currently in Albania today correspond nearly exactly to those Greeks who face them.

2. Deficiencies.

Nearly all the deficiencies are consequence of the effort made from Italy in order to reach only now the parity of the forces during the full development of the operations, are begun, as it is known, in remarkable conditions of inferiority. This premise must be present hold if an objective judgment is wanted to be given on our military situation in Albania. Which thing lacks now mainly?

a. The moral.

The troops that were here - except rare cases - have been able or known to react to the begins and for they unforeseeable failures. They have been at once taken by the "obsession of the Greek", from the danger of the "Greek infiltration", from the "terror of mortars", from the "worry of falling captive".

The Commanders, nearly all always in the impossibility to take part directly in the various actions, for lack of own reserves, have been absolutely incapable to take although minimal initiative, in order to not only increase

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

but the resistance in order to demolish since from the beginning whichever infiltration. It honestly must but find that it is true that it has been lost of the land, and above all of the positions that could seem absolutely impregnable with a minimum of resistance; but that it is true pure that our line from Pogradec to the sea for how very thin has not been ever broken.

This fact and above all the remarkable losses endured especially in died and wounded, demonstrate that our soldier, where it has been well commanded, has known to give until to the last sacrifice without withdrawing. The moral of this soldier can and easy will be raised not just the initiative of the operations, in some or in all the fields, will pass from ours part.

b. Training.

The troops that come from Italy, are in organic divisions are like complements, give in optimal kind impression for their organization, the equipment and, on the whole, for their appearance. But not hardly employed (and someone also after four or five days from the disembarkation) they find serious deficiencies of training. Enough to say that nearly all recalled arrive without not to have one minimal acquaintance of the automatic arms and, in particular of the "Breda 37" machine-gun. Many must go to the fire without not to have never tried to launch a hand grenade ⁽³⁴⁾.

c. Artillery (...).

d. Mortar (...).

e. Connection.

All the Commanders of Armies and Army corps arrive without their organs of connection. All have lived in order much time with insufficient existing means at the beginning in Albania. Therefore remarkable difficulties in the exercise of the command. Currently but many means of connection arrive or are in order to reach and also this deficiency soon will be overwhelmed.

f. Motor vehicles (...).

g. Commanders.

In order to judge the commanders serenely it must keep in mind the above cited situation in which they have had to carry out their action. Initiative? with which means? with which forces?

All comprise online the real necessities but very little times are in conditions for taking adapt provisions in order to at least raise the moral of the troops. Critical situation throws in the furnace, difficultly succeeds without means to resolve it however in our favor.

All it is based on the resistance of the troops online and above all on the action of the commanders of inferior degree. But, decimated by the enemy the majority of the officials in s.p.e., battalions and companies they are the remained in hand to complement officials and not all young, that they have demonstrated serious gaps from the training point of view. Also here, in judging the behavior of these officials, must keep in mind the conditions in which they

34) "I have given to the Duce - writes Ciano on 23 January - a serious and hard letter of Prof. Faccini of Livorno, whose eighteen year old son, mobilized on 17 January, has been sent in Albania the same day, without what he knew as a firearm".

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

they have had to hold the command of tired and demoralized men, both for the action of the enemy and for the uneasiness, that, only visiting front line of this hard front, they can be comprised (...) "⁽³⁵⁾.

The text of such relation constituted *magna pars* of "eight report" that Gen. Pricolo in vain to Mussolini interpolated personal considerations. Of these, the one relative to the Commanders, deserves to be emphasized:

"Still today the same deficiencies are found that I have made You already present, in occasion of my inspection in Albania at the November end, and that they can be reassumed in the inability to appreciate the situation exactly and in the consequent absolute lack of initiative.

In the course of the operations the Greek Commanders have always chosen the more sensitive date and zones for their attacks and put into effect the pre-arranged maneuvers; never once our Commandos have carried out one counter maneuver or at least one effective reaction, limiting themselves to always withdraw, nearly obeying to one fatality. That must make nearly to think to a moral paralysis that as consequence has carried to a physical paralysis and of action.

This passivity of the Commanders cannot not affect strongly on the moral of the troops and the activity of the subordinate commanders"⁽³⁶⁾.

And also true that soon after resuming the text of the office information, the inability and the moral paralysis become impossibility for deficiency of means, however for Mussolini who had to be a new evidence that "*Greece has been a political masterpiece... Who has lacked in full load is the army*".

4. THE COUNTER MANEUVER OF KLISURA.

In the sector of the XXV Army Corps the front had been become stabilized and for the hard climatic and meteorological conditions and because the Greek efforts were being polarized in direction of Berat. For this gen. Rossi profited since from the first January, realizing a more solid support to the Kundreviça and trying to always resolve the spiny issue of the buttress of Mali Palcies in enemy hand. A determined action lead to the total elimination of the Greek nuclei until to the positions of Mali Palcies comprised and to the meticulous mopping-up of the gullies, such that on 10 January the battle for Valona - because that

³⁵⁾ Report dated 18.1.1941.

³⁶⁾ F. PRICOLO, op. cit., p. 406.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

it was the objective which directly stretched the Greek push of the year-end - it could be considered concluded. To such date the defensive position reached by the army corps on 9 December was still substantially intact, in spite of the loss of good part of Kurvelesh; whereas the enemy action was successful to penetrate, the timely predisposition of the strong points withdrawn had allowed to contain the bending and quickly it had been strengthened.

The alignment was articulated in four sectors:

- Salarije valley, entrusted to the *Brennero*, that framed the remainder of the 42nd infantry *Modena*, 231st infantry *Brennero*, the II/18th infantry *Acqui*, the *Bolzano* alpine Bn., , the 45th cc.nn. legion;

- Bençes valley, entrusted to the *Modena*, with the 18th infantry (less the II Bn.) *Acqui*, the III/42nd *Modena* infantry, the 232nd *Brennero* infantry, the 36th and 82nd cc.nn. Bn.;

- Dhrinos valley, assigned to the *Ferrara*, with 47th and 48th infantry, 2nd and 5th bersaglieres, 166th cc.nn.; Bn.

- Zagorias valley, held by the group "Pizzi", with the *Belluno* alpine Bn. and *Val Natisone* (sketch n. 83).

Like everywhere, the levels of force were much to low. The Commander of army corps had calculated to clear on the rear sanitary formations a thousand of men to the week, in period not intense combats. Of these thousand men, eight hundred approximately - that is a battalion - were from considering themselves lost because repatriated with long periods of convalesce. To the state of the facts, in order to replace in feet the units 3rd grenadiers were necessary two battalions complements for each of the regiments, 18th infantry *Acqui* and 42nd infantry *Modena*, beyond nearly all the 81 mm mortars companies. As far as the *Brennero*, just arrived, *"the wear and tear of the men is strong and the force reduces under the eyes - the Gen Rossi wrote. - I ask is predisposed, since of hour, the influx of the complements"*,

Between Kundreviça and Zagorias valley acted the greater part of the Greek I Crops: the 8th Inf. Div. on the plateau of Kurvelesh, the 2nd Inf. Div. in Dhrinos and in Zagorias valley, the 4th Inf. Div. in reserve, in the zone of Libohovo. The danger that had threatened Valona induced - as better it will be said later, dealing of the operations in the coastal field - the Comando Superiore to give life to already for a long time previewed counter-offensive understood to bring back the line of the XXV Corps and the special Corps on the positions occupied before of the inflection of the year-end. Subordinately to such goal

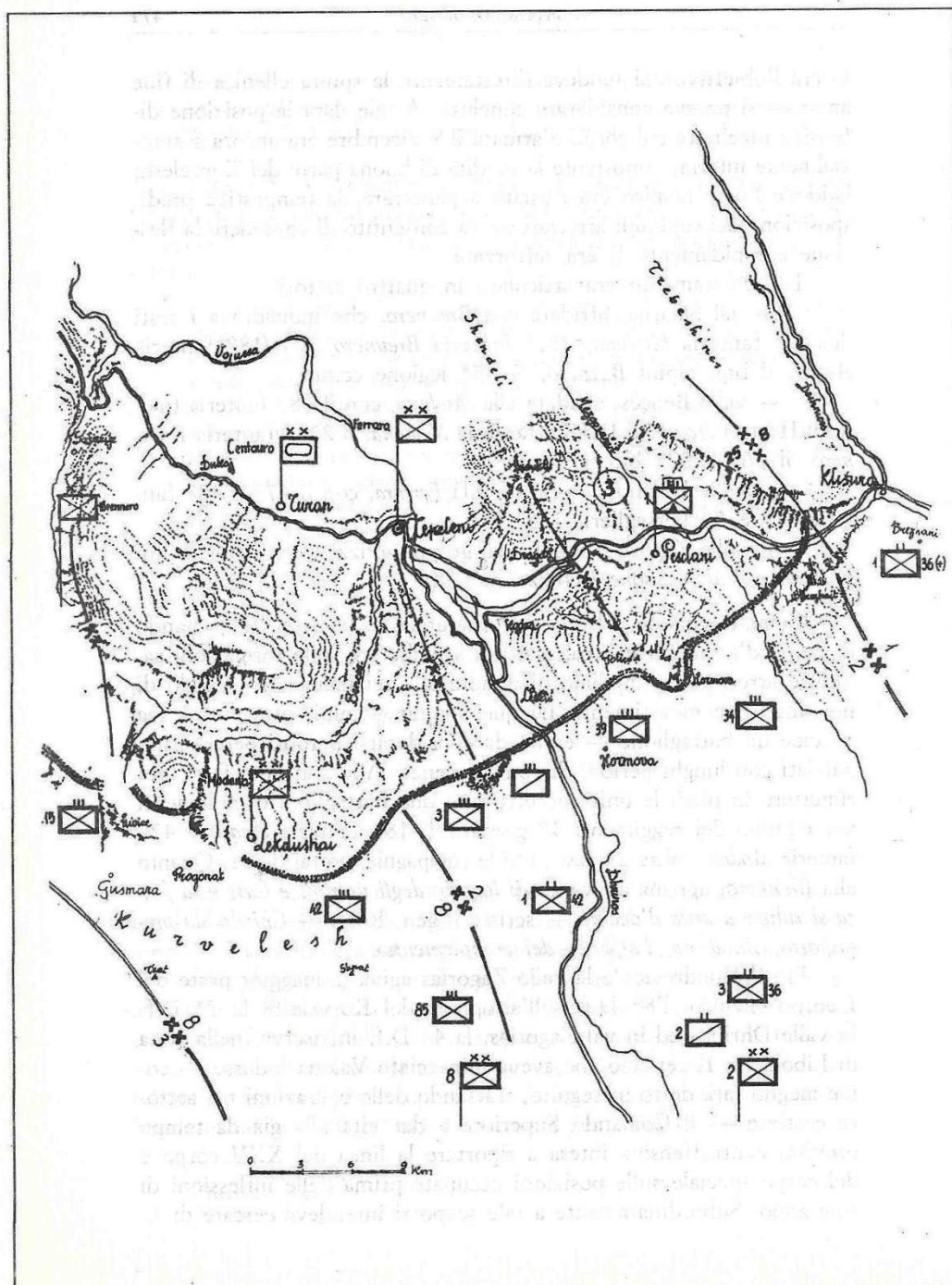
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 480

The situation of the sector of the XXV army corps 10 January

Schizzo n. 83

LA SITUAZIONE NEL SETTORE DEL XXV CORPO IL 10 GENNAIO



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

agreed to try to resume at least locally the initiative, much to influence on the operations in course on all the front of the 11th Army. Initially an action from part of the *Brennero* to tightened favor of the attack of the special Army Corps was programmed, then the directives - on participation of Cavallero - established that the *Brennero*, also acting in co-operation with the initiative from the Sushica valley, aimed at a objective much greater interest for the XXV Corps: the zone of Golemi. For such operation the *Brennero* seemed lend itself well: it had offered good test of if hardly reached and its employment it gave confidence to reconstitute to integrity of the position of resistance between Mali That and Bus Devrit and the unit of the sector already garrisoned from *Modena* ⁽³⁷⁾.

The succeeding events made to delay and to suspend the operation. The night on 10 January, in fact, two patrols pushed on the Klisura, in the sector of the VIII Corps, returned communicating not to have found anything. While it was perceived by the Commander of the army, gen. Rossi proceeded to the constitution of a defensive flank: the Pizzi group was in charge to conserve to the end the positions of Brezhanit and of the outlet of the Zagorias valley, the 2nd bersaglieres had to activate the strong points of Mezgorani and Dragoti, and to push patrols ending under Klisura, to east of the interruptions from mine predisposed on the roadway. For some day, during the withdraw of the right of the IV Corps - that, as it is known, it had replaced the VIII - the Greek 1st Inf. Div. locked under, carrying ahead artilleries and occupying to defense of the Castello di Klisura and the slopes of Mt. Groppa. Since tried all attempts had been rejected without much difficulties, the adversary, with the advance of the units in second group, began to touch the land in order to characterize the weak points or the run of the defense. But Gen. Geloso had given also another order: to always maintain a live threat on the Greek flank, giving to the continuous feeling of understandings offensives from Tepeleni, and have also disposed to put to the study an action departing from the southern Trebeshines towards Klisura in cooperation with an operation lead from the IV Corps along the Deshnices valley. Evidently, with the availability of troops of the XXV Corps not there was much to make. In a talk which happened on the 16th at Elbasan with the two army commanders, Cavallero commented the general situation, comprised the issue of the German divisions,

37) The *Modena* was commanded temporary by Gen. Magli, commander of the *Centauro* Arm. Div.. Gen. Gloria, that had left the assignment for wounds, just reached the front line the Greek-Albanian frontier, will resume the command of the *Modena* on 29 January.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

drawing the attention on the solution of continuity created from the abandonment of Klisura between Chiaf Chiciocut and the Trebeshines. For how much units in a position to taking part existed to back in order plug eventual make them and for how much, at the moment, the left of the XXV Corps appeared sufficiently supported to the ridge in argument, was necessary to try to resolve the problem better.

Geloso proposed to counterattack from Tepeleni with bersaglieres and camicie nere and from the Trebeshines with alpine, for which but some battalion asked still. Cavallero did not accept the idea of reinforces, since urged much more to the 9th Army in order to resume a sure aggressive activity, understanding to lighten the *Pusteria*, and in order to prepare it gradually for the retaken of the Tomorreces valley, in sight of the future operation on Korça. However, the issue could be resolved, having Mussolini various promised to send another four divisions, of which one for the 9th Army and three to disposition of the Comando Superiore Albania as reserve, never reserves had and that it had to conserve it is for the general criterion of the economy of the forces for the offensive resumption. In conclusion, for the moment the mountain divisions could be reordered so that they were ready before the end of February; as far as the 11th Army: freedom of action in the sector of Valona and immediate guarantee of the tactical communication between the IV and XXV Army Corps. "*The ideal - Cavallero added - would be the resumption of Klisura. And a important necessity; we will see when it will be able*"⁽³⁸⁾.

For some day the attention was moved towards the head of the Deshnices valley, then the 19th Cavallero returned to Fieri. He wanted to examine the relationship - of, opposite forces in the Sushica valley and on the shoreline and possession elements for the eventual recovery of the *Legnano* from that sector. The head office information indicated the presumable presence of ten Greek battalions from the sea to the excluded Kurvelesh (in truth was twelve), of two regiments on the Kurvelesh and equal forces to approximately a division in second formation (in truth on the Kurvelesh was lined up the 8th Inf. Div. with two regiments in first group and one, more rear, in second group). As far as the intentions of the enemy, long effort thought not probable the shoreline. The more reliable forecasts could therefore to limit itself to local engagements towards the Bençes valley or in the zone of Klisura. Between the other, the alignment of the Greek artilleries was still much too diluted for being able to suggest a determined offensive guideline. After weigh for and against to have connected with the movement

38) Cavallero Diary, date 16.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of the *Legnano* in the sector of Berat, concluded that he convene to send the IV Corps the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* and to employ it on the right of the *Pinerolo*. The *Legnano* would be while collection in the zone of Mavrova in the middle of the Sushica valley, as reserve.

But it was maturing also the offensive from Tepeleni. The following day Gen. Cavallero went to Dhemblan to personal consult Gen. Rossi. These first of all showed the own systems given to the left (sketch n. 84). The Trebeshines was held from *Val Cismone* Bn. reinforced by two alpine companies; the Cervino Bn. was in arrival and would have controlled the northern part of the ridge of Trebeshines. To the grip between the Groppa and the Brezhanit was arranged a tactical complex of the 2nd bersagliere; Zagorias valley was crossed from the group "Pizzi", with two battalions supported to the Brezhanit and the Golico; more behind, the furrow of the Vojussa was closed from two strong points n. 3 and n. 11. The action on Klisura – according to Rossi – would be due to develop from the Groppa and the Brezhanit and to conclude with the balance possession of the locality. Cavallero was persuaded of the plan and its possibility of resolution, therefore he thought of being able to inform at once Mussolini of the good perspectives:

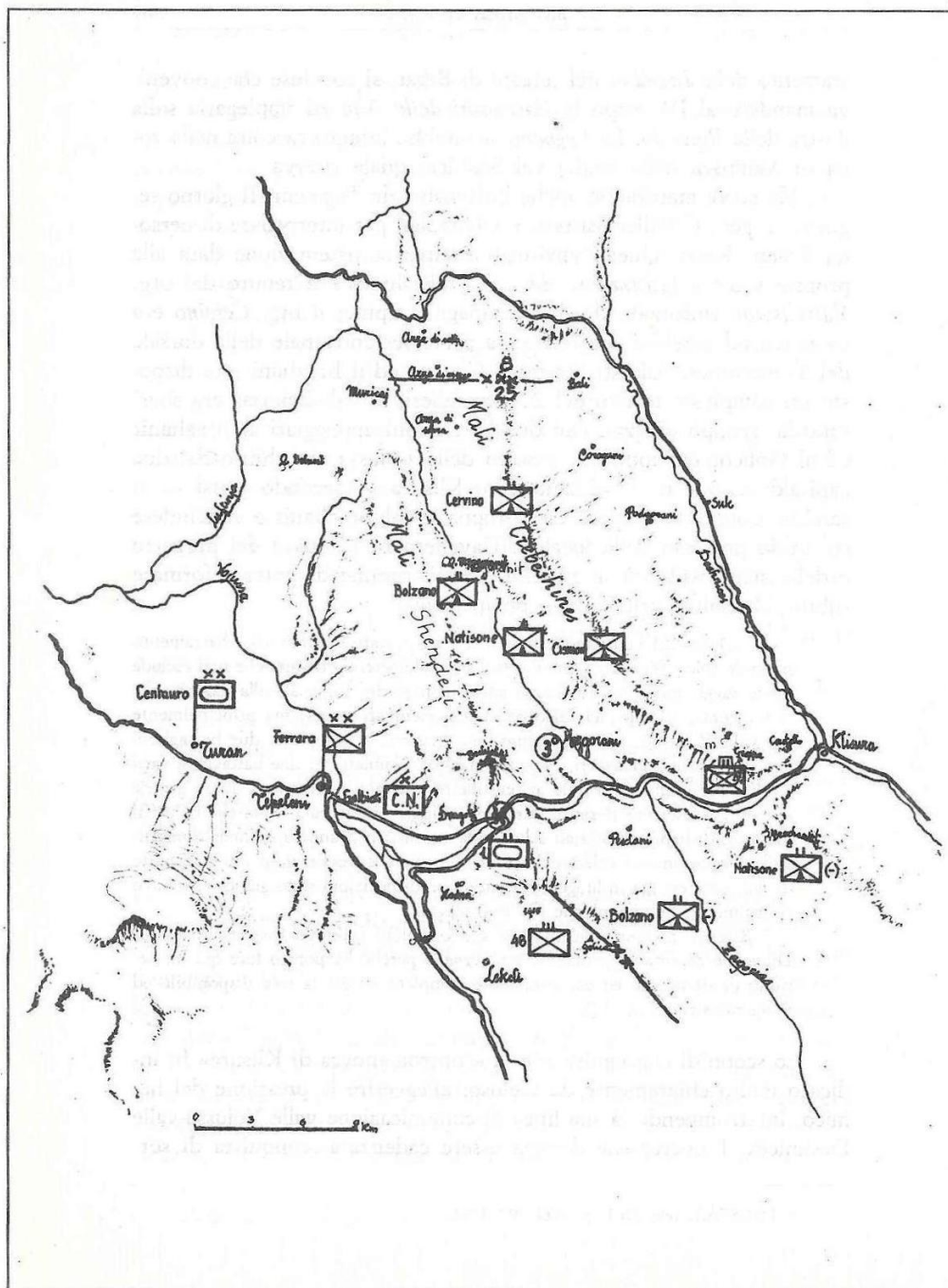
"Duce (...) twenty-fifth Corps has carried before its obstruction in the noted furrows Tepeleni-Klisura at only three kilometers from Klisura that it does not exclude can reach with a leap also with little forces stop to the action, that it will carry out astride of the furrow with little light elements but mainly for the Zagorias valley, will participate to a division to the complete) two mountain battalions, elements bersaglieres, grouping" Galbiati " & two battalions tanks presumable stop it is that such action will put in serious embarrassment Greek operating forces in the Berat sector stop It is entrusted to general Rossi that gives to confidence a good push stop Also I will follow it stop Maneuver begins tomorrow morning with quick movements of the destined forces to operations stop a part of such forces is already in place stop All the predispositions already is put into effect but supply of ammunitions that is in course stop

I think maneuver will reach its complete development week end stop Division destined to the operation is the *Legnano* because it has been able to make here a period of instruction and single truly complete and it is the available one and the weather tightens "(...) ⁽³⁹⁾.

The Goal to achieve with "counter maneuver of Klisura" was indicated very clearly from Geloso: to lighten the pressure of the enemy interrupting his line of communication Deshnices valley - Vojussa valley. The operation had to be marked the rhythm: surprise conquest

39) DSCSF AA, tele 0961/op. dated 20.1.1941.

LA SITUAZIONE DELL'ALA SINISTRA DEL XXV CORPO IL 21 GENNAIO



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of the advance positions of Mt. Groppa and of the Brezhanit; massive participation of the artillery for the immediate support of the troops in charge of the surprise attacks and the successful developments of the attack; violent irruption, *costs what it costs*, of the medium tanks on Klisura for the Vojussa valley. Also ravisando the necessity to make soon, the beginning date of the departure indication of gen. Rossi, in relation at the moment in which the *Legnano* would have been entire available. Just as soon as delineated the event, the two Army Ccorps of the left, than in the meantime they would have had care to engage the forces to their front, would be to their movements time. Of course on specific and firm order remaining that the rear line of the strong points had to remain most solid.

Mussolini followed with every hope the preparations. He sent to Cavallero a card confirming that the *Legnano* would have been replaced first from the *Sforzesca* in enclosed the coastal field and one personal letter for Gen. Rossi. Expressions of incitement and circumstance to part, in as much as full normal especially in war, remain the unacceptableness of phrases "historical" rhetorical and: it was very difficult that a commander of army corps, than from nearly three months lived in the worry of a breakthrough to right or to the center or on the left, believed truly that resuming Klisura the Greek "*collective fall*" could be provoked! On the other hand it is right to admit that the form of some communications to Mussolini could be more cautious.

The development of the operation was organized on three successive phases (sketch n. 85). I phase: occupation by surprise in noted advanced positions, on which, once conquered, had to be moved the fire bases for the accompaniment of the forces destined to act in the second phase. II phase: occupation of the positions of Klisura with the acting *Legnano* on three columns: on the left, the 68th infantry with the cooperation of elements of the *Val Cismon*; to right, the 67th infantry; to the center, the conquered flanks, the 26th cc.nn. legion had to head directly at Klisura, to exceed it and to constitute a bridgehead to the east. III phase: participation on the flank and the rear of the enemy, to east of the Vojussa-Deshnices confluence, work of the army corps reserve.

Established date: 25 January, then sent back to the 26th. The premises were not shining. The *Legnano* reached the lines of departure in the night of the 26th with the most rigid temperature to which the soldiers were not accustomed. In particular, the column of left employed 12 hours in order to cover under the rain down pour the mule track from Mezgorani

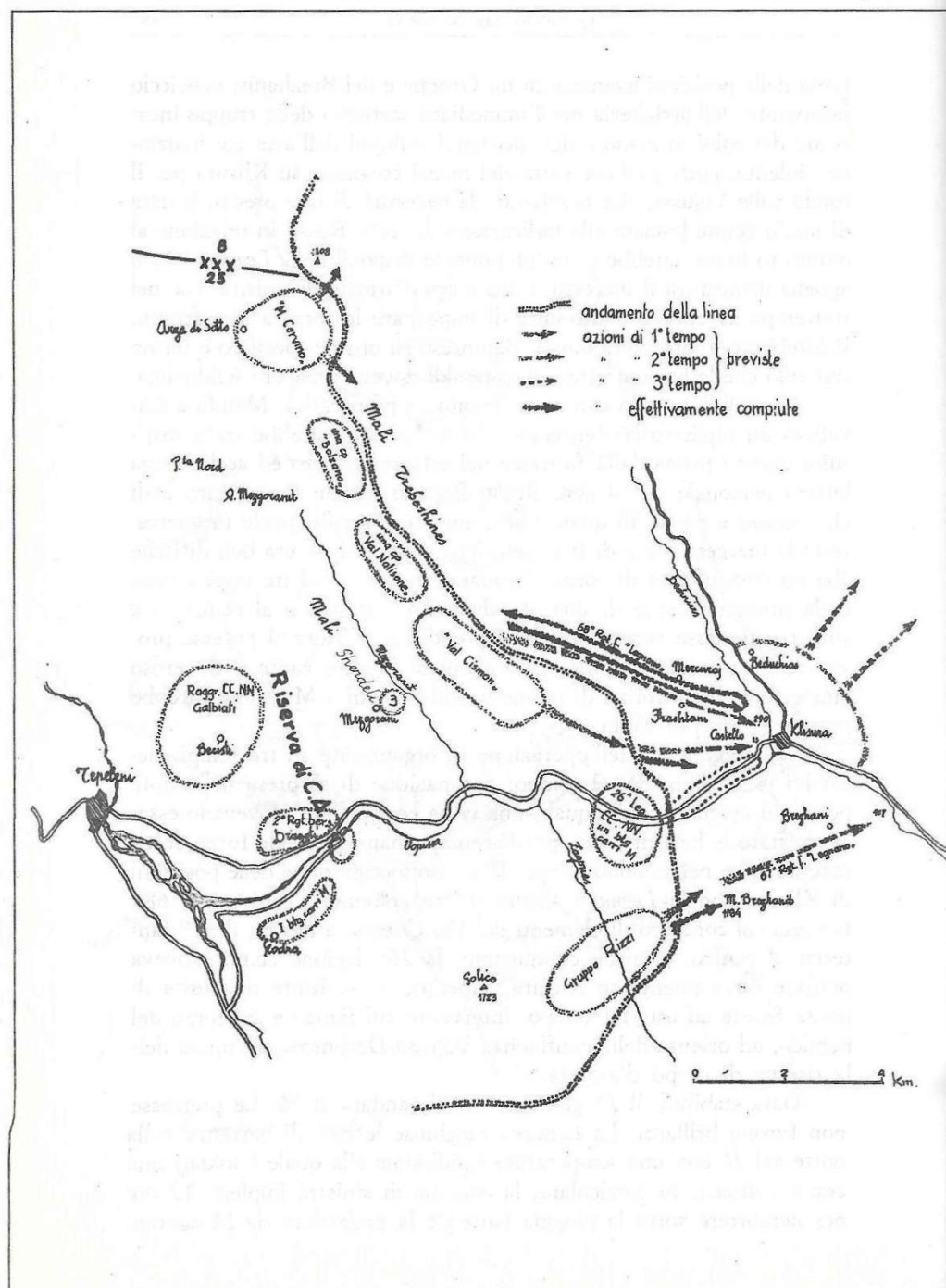
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 486

Outline with counter-maneuver of Klisura

Schizzo n. 85

SCHEMA DELLA CONTROMANOVRA DI KLISURA



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

to the crest of the Trebeshines. Moreover, being the division lacking in baggage train, the refueling was predisposed with columns of bearers. Finally, still before the beginning Gen. Ruggero had to be cleared on a field hospital for the fracture of a leg provoked from the fall of a mule thrown on it⁽⁴⁰⁾). He was replaced by Gen. De Cia, that it had been placed to disposition of the XXV Corps for special assignments.

The two Corps preliminary surprise attacks had different outcome. While the *Val Cismon* with a short but bitter action got hold of Mt. Groppa and, exceeded it, it continued towards the castle, the units of the group Pizzi after a favorable beginning found heated resistance on the summit of Brezhanit and for how much the fight prolonged for all the day did not succeed to open the pass. Given these results, the column of left could advance in its turn until to Frashtani, but that one of right was forced to march in place. The 27th at 04:30 were renewed the onslaught to the top of the Brezhanit: many times taken and lost in the course of the day, after all will remain to the Greeks. In the meantime the center column, with the tanks at the head, had been pushed until to the first houses of Klisura, but arresting itself against a tank destroyer obstruction formed with walls and iron beams: some medium tanks succeeded to pass (in order then to withdraw) but those light ones revealed endured their inability to exceed the obstacle. More to the north, the 68th infantry instead had reached until to the attack objective; unfortunately, remained unbalanced in the front, it was not in a position to maneuver because of a strongest supported Greek counterattack from numerous batteries lined up beyond the Deshnices. In any case the total perspectives seemed good and Cavallero assessed the situation to Mussolini in these terms:

"Action of Tepeleni proceeds gradually exceeding previewed enemy resistances. It proceeds for the high on the two flanks of the corridor while for bottom *Rossi valley* my communication 10:15 hours them that tanks are first houses of Klisura where they have found tank destroyer obstruction that stop is being demolished Behavior troops admirable stop It is necessary to feed action at all costs and therefore I keep myself ready to begin tomorrow morning trucked concentration *Sforzesca* in zone Tepeleni ⁽⁴¹⁾. For Sushica I supply this very day concentrating at Mavrova the *Julia* division which I reorder to be most ready having already received from Italy all arms of infantry & being in fast personal affluence stop ⁽⁴²⁾.

40) Gen. Ruggero had assumed the command of the division on 5 January, at Valona.

41) The first regiment of the *Sforzesca* Inf. Div.(53rd infantry) was beginning disembarkation.

42) The *Julia* was being reformed with the Reg. with two Bns. The organic third Bn., had to arrive from Italy.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The entire offensive attitude from we assumed on the front maintains to make the enemy uncertain on our intentions stop Must but to have much open eyes held on Berat account momentary crisis *Cacciatori* division produced on the 25th, crises that are exceeding stop therefore I have decided that *Cagliari* division which begun disembarkation today concentrates in first at Rogozine & therefore to capacity of both the Armies stop While I have the honor to communicate to you that I hurry to the maximum reconstitution of the divisions withdrawn from the front so as to create itself in place, of hour in then, the necessary reserves, I allow myself to ask you that for hoped exploitation of the right succeeded & guarantee comes here sent a third of the four divisions from You this month to my disposition stop Imports that of this third division attests at Durazzo regiments of infantry & baggage train (...) ⁽⁴³⁾.

Even if it appeared clearly that the facts denounced a sure hasty organization in the operation, the tone is openly optimistic. But a phrase was meaningful: "*for hoped exploitation of the right to succeeded & guarantee comes here sent the third of the four divisions from You put to my disposition*". It cannot be thought that Cavallero meant "*to take advantage of the success*", in the correct sense of the term with the *Sforzesca*, eventually with the *Cagliari* ("*to capacity of both armies*") or in last hypothesis with the third promised division, it is worth to say with divisions that as soon as they had begun to disembark the first elements. And the much likely that in effects he wanted simply "*to complete*" the success, that is to get hold of Klisura with a sure margin, and that, seen the situation, he thought that the *Legnano* and the others could not be enough to the goal. But Mussolini wished success too much in order not to get hold of to every hope and replied at once:

"I take action with alive satisfaction of how much announced approximately course operations stop It is of sum importance not only moral that initiative is in the hands our stop As far as the divisions since the *Forlì* cannot attest before 4-5 February I authorize you to use the *Cagliari* for the 11th Army stop the *Forlì* will go then to the 9th stop dealing therefore of a delay in the implementation of the made promise to Vercellino & are only sure that to Vercellino will become flood reason of the fact stop If as I augur the Greeks they gave some sign of crisis it is useful to you of it in order to push the action in depth" ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

While the Comando Superiore Albania had sent the directives n. 12 ⁽⁴⁵⁾. They were turned to the 11th Army and of it they specified the new tasks:

43) DSCSFAA, date 27.1.1941.

44) DSCS, tele 5858/op. dated 27.1.1941, hours 21:30.

45) DSCSFAA, f. 01325/op. dated 27.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to develop the progress quickly to achieve yourself in the area of Klisura, to assure the inviolability of our front in the field of Berat, to guarantee against any threat from the rear of the field of Tepeleni.

On these bases, he assigned to the 11th Army the *Sforzesca* (Gen. Allearo), holding in reserve of the Comando Superiore the *Cagliari* (Gen. Gianni)⁽⁴⁶⁾.

The combats had received a pause. Gen. Rossi it had been forced to stop shortly in order to reorder the attack device and to carry out the resupply. Then the Greeks made equally, so that the resumption of the fight from part of the *Legnano* met endured with an immediate reaction that quickly invested all the sector from the Trebeshines to the Brezhanit, on both the rivers of the Vojussa. The first collision was delivered against the two pillars of the gorge but the alpine will not yield the conquered land. Soon after it was made to feel the Greek participation of the 4th and the 7th infantry, that attacked the front and on the flank the 68th infantry. The evening of the 29th the gen. Cavallero telephoned to Palazzo Venezia:

"I summarize the events of these days. The action that be able to (Rossi) proceed with difficulties that are opposite from opposing forces arrived in order to try to close, but the progress is continuous. On the left, regarding us, of the furrow, Mt. Groppa has fallen and today is the advance on Castle. The 68th infantry, that acts from the same part has had attacks, but has counterattacked and is advancing. In front of the 67th the enemy is in regression. The road of Klisura is held under our fire not very far away but close and this is the only artery of which they decide.

To right of the furrow it is fought on the Brezhanit that it holds for three days, but will end by falling. And a mountain strong point that they have been able to consolidate. We will carry way. With this action not there was from attending to end up of blow. Behind the *Lupi* already the *Sforzesca* has arrived but it is not engaged. We hammer today with the *Legnano*; tomorrow we will hammer with the *Sforzesca* and subsequently, if it is necessary, also with the others. This action we do not stop because I can feed it more.

On the front of Berat two divisions are deployed those. They fight. The *Cacciatori* have had a colonel hurt to the lung. The *Sforzesca* has lost a colonel for appendicitis. I supply to replace them. I have decided in order to carry to Berat which you have authorized to me. Vercellino has been persuaded of this small sacrifice; small because between two days he will be able to receive (*Forll*).

By now we attack on all the front. He fights himself in Tomoriza valley; between some day he will fight himself at the Devoli; he fights himself on the front of Berat

46) The *Cagliari*, prepared, had on 12 January the news that no more would have left for Albania. Of it they achieved many transfers for other bodies, among which nearly all the senior officials, At disembarkation had only 6 officers in s.p.e. per regiment,

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

it is fought on the front of the XXV and the special C.A.. The thing appears also from enemy radio communications that say that the Greeks defend to hand to hand the land but they do not say more that the Greeks they attack. Prisoners everywhere: in Tomorizza valley; in front of the *Pusteria* (among these a captain); the *Cacciatori* of it have taken 24 more other imprecise today. The *Pinerolo* has made captive; the alpine of *Val Cismon* have taken some more than hundreds but they have not been able to carry them all away. Prisoners also on the front of *Pinerolo*. Magnificent spirit. The tried units come rear and everywhere people hub themselves. Empty an impressive fact from mortars in the *Val Cismon* Bn. has been at once overwhelmed and the Bn. it has continued. The *Val Chiese* is online and goes well. People enter to Berat in order to make the barrier. From this moment in then it increases to every day our efficiency because I have 5 divisions in rearrangement and Verzellino of he has another two (*Piemonte* and *Parma*). To the 11th Army the *Julia* it has already re-united 6,000 men, have comprised two Bns.. Between two weeks it will be ready. The *Lupi* already is re-united for being put to place. The *Bari* and the *Modena* are joined. The *Siena* has still some online, but soon it will be withdrawn.

Therefore, with what you have given us, with what it arrives and with what I reorder to increase our efficiency. The action on Klisura will continue until to the end. If as a result of those dead happen made that they facilitate to us, well; but of it we do not have need⁽⁴⁷⁾.

(...) I have seen and I wanted to thank you [for the complements Bn]. I think that these units will not be employed before a month and therefore will be able to train itself. I ask to allow the summarize how much follows: we have made action on Klisura from which we cannot wait for us of having a result of run express. We will continue with energy and tenacity until the opposing exhaustion and not ours. On the other foreheads as I have said to you. Our efficiency increases of day by day; With these actions made with method, that scholastic but it is not adapted to the situation, we put to point the same situation and between some week, when we have results of greater amplitude, I will be happy makes your report complete. For the zone of Klisura to us enough to have the outlet; to us enough because therefore it is resolved all and Premeti it will come if. When we end up happens go to rack and ruin and it is gone where it wants. The action of Valona is always ready. I have attended to make it and has been a fortune, because therefore I have been able to employ the *Legnano*. You have confidence. We attack everywhere. It can are given that the enemy tries of gives annoyances to us on Berat, but I refortify myself. Here, in the country, it is necessary to put much water on the fire, since I believe that we are arrives to you goodness knows where!"⁽⁴⁸⁾

It is a warlike reveille that law unwillingly. Not there is need of comment. The sensitive wear and tear, the loss of the commander of the regiment and the two commanders of battalion, all hurt fallen, and the insufficient support of artillery, for distance and deployment reasons, forced after two days of locked action the column

47) On 29 January 1941 Metaxas died.

48) Cavallero Diary, dated 29.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of left withdrawing towards the crest, where already the two cc.nn. battalions had offered themselves of the divisional legion.

To this point, to the left extreme of the army corps one was outlined confused situation: the connection with the VIII Corps appeared uncertain, the location of the units on the northern feature of the Trebeshines turned out conflicting and of quickly not easy clarify for the distance, the brokenness of the land, rage of the bad weather. All, having news instead that Greek elements approached on the ridge. But the Commander of the army had ordered the VIII Corps to bring back the own line on the positions of hill 1308 of Mali Trebeshines - Chiaf Lusit - Spi and to realize a strongly welding with the XXV in correspondence of Arza di Mezzo and Muriçaj, but Gen. Rossi, at dark of the 30th, signaled the situation to his left as "particularly critical" for the violence of the Greek attacks, especially in direction of the crest of Trebeshines to south of hill 1308: the southern part of the chain could not more be held. It was necessary to suspend the offensive and to pass to a defensive attitude. The action against Klisura, conduct for five days with bloody combats and deprives of a sure one and effective coordination with the VIII Corps, had not reached the objectives it hopes for and however it was the first action of decided reaction. Undoubtedly it averted good part of the destined enemy forces to feeding the offensive on Berat, making them feel the impending danger on the roadway of Deshnices valley, the only road that concurred the easy refueling of the 1st with and the 15th Inf. Div. From the end of January Greeks they will stop to pursue the objective of Berat and will turn all their efforts to the conquest of Tepeleni, threatening salient to obstruction of the valleys Vojussa, Zagorias and Dhrinos, possible line of departure for Italian counter-offensives.

In the late afternoon of the 31st Gen. Cavallero and Geloso were met at Rrogozhine in order to estimate the facts. Cavallero observed:

"The situation is known. To adorn can because forces they are some. If we want to organize these forces in order to form a mass three weeks are necessary. But we cannot make confidence that the enemy us will give us much time. It is necessary therefore to block the dangerous roads and at the same time to keep in mind who if we are not firm we still lose land. It would be desirable that then to more soon we put ourselves in conditions for making some push from Chiaf Chiciocut and Klisura, the two only possible directions...

(...) Seen the picture that it is shown, we must conciliate the conditions of our units with the necessity for taking breath without to await twenty days. We will be able to act on the Trebeshines from the north. We must resume the action on Klisura. We can act from the Chiaf Chiciocut towards Chiaf Lusit,

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

Even if the thing is not progressed does not have importance. Enough to engage. Between two days I wish to see which shape the problem takes. Moreover it must energize the VIII Corps, that it is a little to weak. Finally it must consider the Arze. In this zone we must give organic unity and connect it with Mali Shendeli well. Above all to give unit of command and to avoid that it is repeated what has been taken place recently, when the cc.nn. they have not moved. It must, in short, constitute a Command equipped of connections and tools,. machine-gunners Bn, even also that from position of the Gen. Rivolta. As commander, I would put momentarily Zappino. In short makes all what it is necessary for giving organic unity to the Muriçaj-Arze zone. The Greeks must feel that also after the accidents we have not lost the bite (...).

I conclude synthesizing: to guarantee to us - to put in efficiency the *Legnano* - to study the resumption in short time (...) ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

After these conclusions Gen. Cavallero signed directives n. 13:

"The action in the area of Klisura, also being itself concluded with a withdraw from the Mount Groppa zone, has succeeded effective, like has demonstrated the opposing reaction. In order to put itself in a position to resuming to the more soon guiding initiative it is necessary but to strengthen endured the obstruction of the most dangerous ones with particular reference to the Arze-Muriçaj zone, that it is necessary to reorganize under an only Command (...). our initiative must while be maintained by means of local actions, until that the divisions *Sforzesca* and *Cagliari* have reach a sufficient degree of readiness for being able to resume the action from south and north, in correspondence of the Trebeshines zone in order to retake the offensive outlet of Klisura and give space to our occupation of Ciafa Chiciocut (...). Visa vie the moment of the action same me reserve to decide based on the proposals that the Army commander of the 11th; and that also for how much concerns the putting to disposition of the same army of the *Cagliari* division, that it remains for now to the dependency of this Command"⁽⁵⁰⁾.

In adhesion to such directives Gen. Geloso determined tasks and course of the resistance position:

- XXV Corps: to maintain puts into effect the dispositions in correspondence of furrows Muricaj - Proj Mezgoranit, as well as the obstruction of the Vojussa valley and the survivors occupations on the crest of the Trebeshines; to strengthen the welding with the VIII C.A., in correspondence of the triangle Muriçai-Arza di Mezzo-Arza di Sopra; to occupy to defense with the *Sforzesca*, beyond to the elements already in place, the positions of Mali Shendeli;
- VIII Corps: to maintain the line puts into effect them, with strong attitude

49) Cavallero diary, dated 31.1.1941.

50) DSCSFAA) f. 01485/op. dated 31.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

aggressive; to perfect the occupation of the zone of welding with the XXV Corps in correspondence of the slip road Arza di Mezzo-Muricai; to keep itself ready to resume the offensive action in cooperation with the XXV Corps, according to opportune directives, however orienting itself to employ a new division in order to act from Chiaf Chiciocut;

- IV Corps: to perfect the alignment put into effect so as to be able to face every eventual enemy offensive resumption; to keep itself ready to seize at the first favorable occasion in order to resume the initiative and to bring back themselves on the positions of Chiaf and Murit and Mali Spadarit;

- special Corps: to maintain the positions of Mt. Messimerit and hill 1252, in correspondence of the watershed Sushica valley - shoreline; to guarantee the obstructions of the line of facilitation of the Smokthines.

5. THE DEFENSE IN THE COASTAL SECTOR.

In the last week of December 1940 Gen. Messe had supplied to reorder his heterogeneous troops as flowed the units of *Acqui* and the *Cuneo*, while the exhausted *Siena* came replaced and withdrawn from the line for the delayed rest. On 1 January the special army corps was articulated on two fields and a reserve.

In the Sushica field the special D. alp. (Gen. Piazzoni)⁽⁵¹⁾ comprising the 2nd alp. of the *Cuneense* was found, I/7th and the III/8th Inf. of the *Cuneo*, the groups sqd. Guide and *Milano*. Said units were under the orders of the Commander of the *Trieste* mot. Div..

51) assumed Denomination of the *Trieste* Mot. Inf. Div., whose commander with the only Command of division and the regiment of artillery found in Albania, while all the rest 65th e 66th infantry, DVIII btg. mitr., 9th bersaglieres, LII engineers Bn. and 80th truck company remained in Italy. Worse was when Gen. Piazzoni came to know the decision of the S.M.R.E. "to employ the motorized division" Trieste temporary ", to which the Gen is assigned as vice commander. Cassata, for eventual actions of competition to the coastal defense of the salentina peninsula "(f. 210 date 4.1.1941). The unit also not entering to make part of the coastal organization in action, had to be carried where in the zone of Francavilla – Lecce - Gallipoli "not being possible, given the urgency of the transfer and the time that it would demand, the construction of lodgings and the employment of shacks, assignment will have to be made on the existing the only revives of billeting; the systemizing must not however have precarious character in how much the permanence in zone of the division could prolong in the time (...)". Known that Piazzoni addressed directly to Gen. Cavallero. But the *Trieste* did not ever go to Albania: it was destined makes honors in North Africa.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

The Shoreline field was held from the Commander *Acqui* Inf. Div. (Gen. Mariotti) with the 7th Inf. (less I Bn.) of the *Cuneo*, the 17th Inf. (less III Bn.) of *Acqui*, the 18th cc.nn. legion, the 83rd cc.nn. assault Bn. , the II/31st tank and two companies bersaglieres. In reserve the Commando was conserved *Cuneo* Inf. Div. (Gen. Melotti) with the *Galbiati* cc.nn. grouping, the 31st tank with only the IV light tank Bn., the IV medium tank battalion. Superfluous every comment on the composition of such blocks of forces.

For how much the new units were fresh because just disembarked, the situation and the alignment appeared precariously weakness and resided in the cited fragmented, the incompleteness of units⁽⁵²⁾ and in the unsatisfactory firmness of the sector limits. This last aspect remained for some in dangerously suspended day. For the welding between the divisions, Gen. Messe took part dryly speeding up the commander of the Shoreline field to assume a balance at first support of wing with the occupation of the mule track crossroads of Q. Gurt, to the west of Maja and Valit is worth to say of the positions that they control the access to the chain of the Mali Cikes and exercise dominion on the head of the Sushica:

"(...) draft of not easy but indispensable enterprise, is in order to guarantee our defense, is in order to assure the indispensable base to us in order to very soon undertake to the famous counter-offensive action. And that in order to remove to the adversary the initiative of the operations. I repeated once again that not there is a minute to lose. All your employees must be comprised of this absolute, urgent necessity (...)"⁽⁵³⁾.

For the left of the Sushica field, to contact with the XXV Corps, the grip of Vermic was necessary to realize the shoulder support getting hold of the dominant positions and to avoid expectable infiltrations if not quite attacks, to the Mureve. The convenience derived some not only to advance the obstruction of the high valley of Smokthina - what that still had not been made - but also the urgency to occupy the highpoints that forbid the pains tractions in Sushica from the tactical valley way that they give the Mureve reached until to Çipi i Vogel, southern shoulder of Vermic.

52) on 3 January at Valona, the end of a report held from Gen. Cavaliero near the Command of the special army corps, Gen. Melotti represented that the *Cuneo* still had at Brindisi the kitchen and the cases of baking.

53) DS special Army corps, f. 484/op. dated 31.12.1.940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

In as far as the previewed counter-offensive, the initial idea of Gen. Geloso was to exercise a large effort on the eastern end of the Kurvelesh in order to clean it up completely, making to act the *Brennero*, from the field of the XXV Corps, on Bejkes-Mureve- Thmonit while the 2nd alpine would have headed with two columns of two Bns. each respective at the Mureve and Thmonit. To south of the Sushica the 7th infantry would have had the task to smash in to Vranishta and to reach Q. Gurt and the watershed. Cavallero, to which the plan for great lines was exposed, was not very convinced, above all because in such a way the *Brennero* risked to wear away itself without to resolve the problem of the XXV Corps, of which it was the only fresh division, and suggested to examine if the axis of the Sushica valley did not convene instead a violent action in long depth: before the troops in place, in second line up the four battalions of the *Legnano* in imminent arrival and in third formation the five battalions camicie nere of the Galbiati grouping. Some modification was had therefore understanding to entrust the entire operation to the special army corps, with begins them marginal cooperation from part of the XXV Corps, that it could in such a way be concentrated on the furrow of Golemi, of pre-eminent importance for own field.

Place that objectives assigned to Gen. Messe were the passes of Drass and of Vestes, the maneuver was seen in two phases: the first one delivered at dawn of 5-6 January, had to carry to the conquest of Thmonit-Maja Lepietres; the second, subject to the previous work of units in the second to group (that is expectably the 8 or 9 January), had to lead to Q. Vestes. It was thought opportune that the gravitation of the effort came exercised from the Sushica valley in how much the resolution of the attack in this direction would have resolved also the coastal problem. The troops to disposition appeared conspicuous: the *Legnano*, two new cc.nn. Bns, beyond the reservoir of the special army corps. Then the *Legnano* was awaited at Valona for the 4th or the 5th and therefore could limitedly be only considered like one major unit in second formation and to the infantry. The two Bns. of the militia, instead, they were already disembarked. The result of this situation was a new adaptation. The 4th Gen. Messe circulated the operations order. It is made were programmed on the basis of the succession of which sketch has been said (n. 86).

The device previewed two divisions in the first formation, the special alp. Div. (three, alpine Bns., two infantry Bns., one of camicie nere with six groups of, artillery) and *Acqui* (four Bns. infantry, one of light tanks, two of camicie nere with five groups of artillery) and two

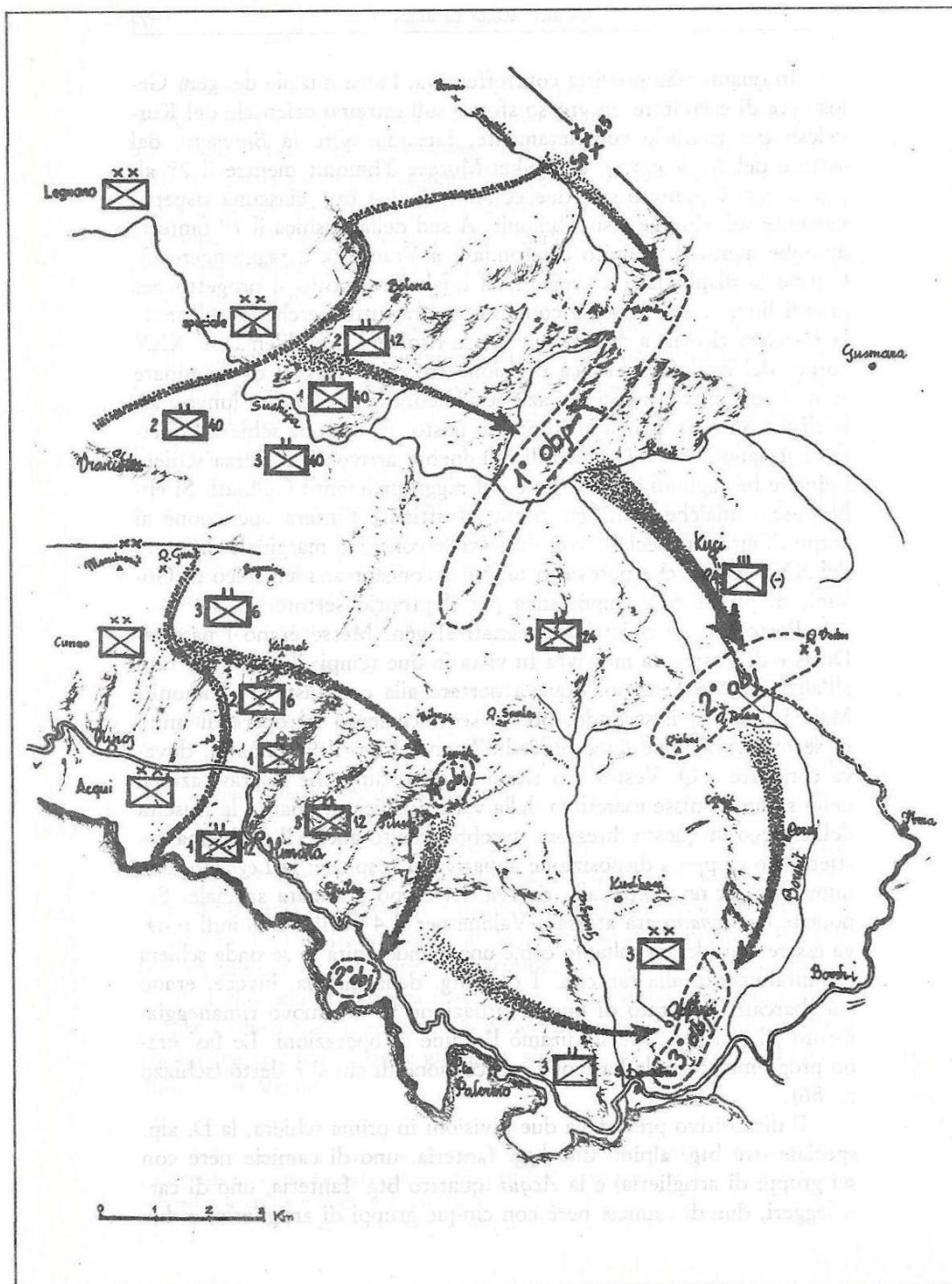
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 496

The maneuver design with the special army corps (January 1941)

Schizzo n. 86

IL DISEGNO DI MANOVRA DEL CORPO D'ARMATA SPECIALE



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

groupings in second formation, respective a regiment of the *Legnano* with four infantry battalions and the Melotti grouping with four cc.nn. battalions (Galbiati) and two tank coy.. In await of the executive order yields in the meantime the necessary to reject new Greek attacks, than they did not succeed to graze the also hastily prepared defense, and giving the maximum impulse to the rear obstructions of Vermic, where had offered the Bn. *Borgo S. Dalmazzo*, of Brataj-Terbaçi, Logora pass and Shendellint pass. They in such a way passed a ten of days without events of substantial interest, but the availability of the entire *Legnano* - even if, seen 7 January from Cavallero and Geloso, it was recognized needing of anothers 48 hours in order to be completed of means and to carry itself to the devout of work seemed to open perspective very favorable for the offensive, being concurred see again the alignment. In first formation they figured the special alp. Div. (force unchanged but two sqd. groups in addition), and *Cuneo* (four Bns. infantry, eight Bns. cc.nn., two Bns. light tanks and one medium tank, seven artillery battalions. In second formation there was the *Legnano*, whose disembarkation was being completed, and one cc.nn. Bn..

Unchanged the objectives and the attack directions For the D-1 and the D moreover the participation of Aviation was previewed and of Navy on the objectives and on the rear positions.

The information on the enemy supplied the following picture: At the head of the Sushica valley, the 8th Inf. Div. with more than 4,500 men between Bolena-Vranishta and Kuçi (in truths the 40th Inf. was dealing with four Bns); on the coastal strip, the 3rd Inf. Div. with two regiments in first group and in second, probably in the zone of Piluri (the 12th infantry in truths they were deployed, except a cedutò Bn. in reinforcement to the 40th, and the 6th infantry); to rear, the 24th infantry (effectively in the area with the III recognition group) and perhaps the 39th euzones (than instead was in other locality). Towards Pigerasi cavalry units were thought in collection.

After all, of front to the Greek 3rd Inf. Div., articulated in the two fields of the total Kalarat and Himara with twelve battalions, they were gotten ready to move nine battalions of infantry, a seven of militia and armored tactical group, with the *Legnano* (six btg.) ready to climb over to time debit the advance troops: carry out, therefore, of sufficient forces to assure the success, especially in the feature in which one agreed to realize the maximum pressure: the head of the Sushica. But it must find that the Italian plan was based on the forecast not of twelve enemy Bns. *but*, to the limit) of

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

eighteen (equal to two divisions), beyond to that it was presumed collected at Pigerasi. In the light of these elements, therefore, can themselves be doubted truly of the opportunity of the offensive at all costs ordered from Rome, are also admitting that the Greek defensive situation had a readiness character necessarily and holding account that the *Legnano* was *nearly* complete. It was by now well-known, in fact, than major unit in flow from Italy was painfully lacking of a mixture and appropriate training of with and characterizes, because of the hurried remobilization and of the still faster departure.

As far as the units of the M.V.S.N., these deficiencies they turned out as famous it is aggravated from the insufficient organic table. It is necessary to put in evidence that since from the beginning of the conflict - not before - all the Commanders had marked the insufficient efficiency of the militia. And true that to the person of Mussolini no one revealed the simple truth. Indeed, more than once, in occasion of telephone conversations, the rendering of the Bn. of the exalted militia turn out without some necessity. Not even Starace that also, on return to Rome after a short apparition at the front, had been expressed without clarity on the course of the operations: "Starace, *veteran from Albania, sees much black and judges with strict words the behavior of our troops*" ⁽⁵⁴⁾ thought opportune to touch with the Duce the key of the fascists. However the Comando Superiore Albania had placed the issue clearly to the Ministry of the War:

"The employment of the cc.nn battalions., lively awaited in order to check the difficult situation puts into effect, was based on the presupposed one of being able to decide of units efficient, well-educated and composed for the greater part of combatants of other wars; that is of units that, to the highest prerogatives of these formations, join also a good technique of the already acquired from combat on the battlefield.

Someone of the battalions heads arrival has totally answered to the wait, but some other has introduced such deficiencies that deem necessary to look on to avoid harmful illusions:

- incomplete equipment and armament: I cite 155th Bn. as an example lacking 18 machine guns; 163rd lacking 6 - 45 mm mortars; the 10th lacking rucksacks for mortars; the 164th with some camicie nere without armament does not characterize;
- training deficient: little knowledge of the machine-guns; nearly no practice with mortars and hand grenades
- organization in defective kind for insufficient instruction and professional ability.

In these conditions it would be necessary to be able to have the time in order to *complete here, to organize and to train these battalions before sending them in to the line,*

54 G. CIANO, Op. cit., page 482.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

time that often lacks since sometimes the circumstances impose road haulage immediately towards the combat front the units just arrived via airplane (...)⁽⁵⁵⁾

The news arrived equally to the ear of Mussolini, but only the first days of January and probably through General Guzzoni, which he wrote to Tirana:

"From information arriving to the Duce it turns out that the cc.nn. Bn. rendering has not been which attended stop Duce wishes with regard to the explicit opinion commanders naturally support major unit from the determining facts same judgment".⁽⁵⁶⁾

But consequences of the demobilization of 600,000 men would be durations still for many weeks.

The Greek offensive on Berat, begun on 8 January in the field of the *Julia*, said an abrupt blow of arrest to the preparations. The morning of the 9th Cavallero, than had been at once carried to Berat near the tactical Command of the 11th Army, telephoned to Col. Bartiromo - for the consequent communications to Mussolini - saying, among other things that "*this situation we waited for and have taken it all the provisions in order to face it. I do not move from the place until the situation is clear (have come to Fieri in order to telephone, but then I return in place). We will decide then for the other offensive because aviation, already hindered by the weather, cannot do two services*"⁽⁵⁷⁾. The 17th the *Galbiati* grouping received order to move with urgency into the Tepeleni zone, at the disposition of the XXV Army Corps, and the 19th Cavallero returned to Fieri and examined the possibilities of the enemy in the field of the special army corps in order to decide if to withdraw or not the *Legnano*. The intelligence gave the presence of ten battalions from the sea to the excluded Kurvelesh and it did not preview Greek initiatives that stretch of the front, but Gen. Geloso was of warning that, at least for some day still, was opportune not to touch the division, is because the Sushica valley would have been too much stripped of its defense because the *Legnano* simply in order to withdraw itself from the valley would have had them need of a pair of days. In these conditions, being pressing the participation for carrying out in the field of Berat, appeared preferable to send the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* of fresh arrival and to consider the *Legnano* as the potential reserves. The decision taken, Geloso communicated

55) DSCSFAA, f. 555/O.M. dated 5.12.1940.

56) M.G. tele 102359/77-1-76 Gab, date 13-1-1941.

57) Diary Cavallero, date 9.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to Gen. Messe that the planned offensive was suspended until new orders and that therefore it was necessary to assume a more adherent device to the new phase of waiting, holding very present the absolute necessity to guarantee at whichever cost the safety of Valona on the positions occupied at the moment. The *Legnano*, therefore, had to withdraw and to be moved on greater depth between Mavrova and Gjormi in Sushisça valley, ready to move towards Tepeleni. The 24th the Commander of the 11th Army circulated the executive dispositions for the counter maneuver of Klisura, dispositions that reserved to the special army corps the single task to couple the Greeks on all its own front in order to confuse them, carrying out actions of strong combat patrols against particularly sensitive points and large fire concentrations on objectives of detached importance. The according to the activity developed on all the front the lines of the operating design, but the enemy reaction, also not being in a position to preventing the loss of some position in the northern field, soon succeeded to organize itself and to acquire true form of and own counterattack in the zone of Q. Gurt with the obvious intention to turn the left wing of the *Cuneo*.

Once again the episode brought to light as the Greeks manage to characterize the features on which the lines of welding between Italian major unit and thereby ran, of preference, headed with decision; as they did not hesitate, it is clear facing logistic series land difficulties and to develop the attacks from the high to eradicate the pillars of the alignment; as finally the contact points became of decisive importance when they coincided with the supports to the flanks of the units, since their fall could allow with the attacker, of falling on the flanks and the rear of the defender. In the circumstance, for the special mountain division, the zones where found the sector limits with the *Cuneo* and with the XXV Corps, they comprised, as is natural, also the hinges of the obstruction of the Sushisça valley. For the *Cuneo* the contact point with the division of left represented the key of the alignment of the entire field of the shoreline. And just that one was jumped.

It became therefore necessary and urgent it retook of Q. Gurt with an operation determined from part of the *Cuneo* and with the competition of a alpine Bn. of formation from part of the special alp. Div. The 29th at noon Q. Gurt was retook, but only for twenty four hours. The 31st Gen. Messe was forced to inform the Commander of the Army who the situation imposed some provision of essentially organic character:

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

"The completed operations witness in the zone of Allonaqit-Qafa and Gurt, where, as known, our offensive headed have met with a strong enemy attack, have confirmed the absolute necessity to decide of a minimum of organic units, infantry or alpine (...).

To the state put into effect them:

a) Field division " *Cuneo* ": the recent increase of forces on the advance positions of the ridge - indispensable increase in order to face possible enemy attacks - has rendered burdensome the problem of the supply, from is made essentially by man carried, in order to assure which are daily employed from the 250 the 300 men. It achieves some that the commander of the *Cuneo* in order to make headway to eventual possible operating requirements can only count on the III/7th infantry, today in course of reorganization and destined which reserve of the center field of the divisional alignment;

b) the field of the special mountain division: with the successful movement of the inner limit of the C.A. field (...) the availability of the *Borgo S, Dalmazzo* alp. Bn. has come less. Only element remaining in the hands of the commander of the division is the I/3rd grenadiers, unit but still in way of reorganization and therefore of material efficiency somewhat dubious. Also the commander of special the mountain division finds himself, therefore, in conditions very precarious because, also wanting to make resorted to the sector reserves, they are how much ever modest (...).

In the picture of the total situation of the special C.A the Sushica valley undoubtedly represent the more delicate field for which is prevailed adapted alignment of forces, especially after the movements of enemy troops recently found in the zones of Mureve-Bejkes:

c) Commander of C.A.: the army corps does not arrange, as is known, of any reserves. To the unexpected necessities of the divisional fields has been supplied until today with urgent movements and hurrying of elements, from one field to the other, exceeding not light difficulties. The necessity of a reserve of the C A. opportunely located appears every more necessary daily. I must however add that the presence of the bitter ridge of Maja Qorrës-Mali Çikës-M. Messimerit, that it separates the divisional fields clearly and that renders slow and laborious the lateral movements, suggests to give the precedence to the constitution of the sector reserve. Eppertanto, the issue of the forces available within the special C.A., (...) induces to me to ask that Command how very close:

1) to transfer of course to the dependencies of the special C.A.: at first, all the units of the 8th infantry *Cuneo* now located near the other C.A.; in according to time, that it would have but to follow they give close the first one, the I/17th infantry *Acqui* and all the 18th infantry *Acqui*;

2) in attended of the transfer - and the indispensable reorganization - of the above indicated units, it comes assigned a Bn. at least at organic in full efficiency, alpine or of infantry, equipped in order to operate in mountain.

In parallel with the movements of the units hand to hand would have to be sped up the fast affluence of the complements to the end to replace ready in efficiency the same units that these endure however losses ⁽⁵⁸⁾.

58) DS Commander special army corps, f. 121/R.P. dated 31.1.1941,

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

It was an nth acknowledgment that in order to straighten a situation compromised from wrong strategic formulation time and patience are necessary.

However, with much hard work, the reorganization of the troops of Albania had been put in motion. On 13 January Cavallero had made the point with the Lt. Col. Fornara, head of the operations section of the Comando Superiore:

"We must always consider of in front of us a efficient Greek army and that therefore our wearing down can continue. We have already employed the four divisions that are arriving in one various situation from that one previewed; I point out that the Greeks are exhausted have been misleading. I conclude that the continuous action and while we must reshuffle the alpine units for the push of February aim as new events we impose other behavior. Supposing that the transports are continuous and that the Country has available all the materials that we ask, is necessary twenty days to which must add five of unexpected at least, much more than Adm. Sportiello is not successful to arrive to the 4,000 tons per day.

They are nearly sure that the Country does not have all what we ask. Therefore we concentrate our effort on the alpine. I admit that the capacity to day of the units online is possible and that while we can put to place a unit in order to operate. Therefore what is in more regarding the alpine is absorbed from the line.

I will ask the Duce to only complete the alpine and I will say to him that for the other units it will be necessary x time, based on the possibilities of the Country. It will decide if to that date they will still serve him. I doubt some because he would want to anticipate regarding Germany (...)"⁽⁵⁹⁾.

Going then to Foggia in order to confer with Mussolini and Guzzoni, he had received assurance of a convenient reinforcement: before the Cagliari and the "*completions*" (are worth to say all the units still in awaiting boarding in order to reach their own G.U.) for ten - twelve divisions, with precedence for those alpine; in second request others would be arriving three divisions (that while they came prepared in the home land). Independently from that, and in the intervals between the various transports, the shipment of the supply, the "*complements*" (for the replacing of the losses) and eventually of German troops was previewed.

Circa the complements, Mussolini answered on 29 January:

"With a effort that deserves wide acknowledgment & as already has been communicated, before 5 February next there will be sent 15 battalions to you of complements in order to integrate six proven divisions stop the complements have

59) Cavallero Diary, date 13.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

a highly summarized training come to a stop must hold of account & while they are mixed others to continue their training ".

It was not exactly the ideal.

6. THE REFLECTIONS ON THE OPERATIONS IN ALBANIA IN THE POLITICAL - MILITARY AREA.

One has been seen since from December contacts existed with Germany for a direct aid (a mountain division in Albania) or indirect action through Bulgaria on Salonico), meant to lighten the pressure exercised from the Greek forces on the Albanian front. 31 December, from Obersalzberg, Hitler wrote to Mussolini a letter of good wishes in which, next to a lesson of political-military behavior:

"(...) You leave me, to the principle of this letter, to establish what, that is that the events that affect us today all have innumerable examples in the history of the wars and the people. In the majority of the cases the Great ones.

Powers have begun the attack against small States nearly always with much too meager means and then in the first opening stage of this is very often they have suffered setbacks. The German history possesses to such care one entire series of examples. Exactly I think necessary in similar cases to attack, when it is possible, with advanced forces, also to risk to lose the sympathy of those who in the parity of the forces they want to see one necessary premise for the just acknowledgment of the winner (...)",

he formulated some vague promise, but without too much to commit himself:

"(...) As a result of the events of Greece, like also in Albania and Africa North, I continuously meditate the really effective countermeasures that can be adopted especially from my part. With the word "effective" I mean to avoid all these aids that are get exhausted in if same and carrying out in their stead truly decisive operations and that therefore they are for if same of relief. For how much one refers to the directed aids to Italy, Your desires, Duce, I only note. They - for how much it is in our possibilities -- will be satisfied. In some fields that will not be possible. But it will be possible to offer other aids that however they will lead to the wished result (...)",

and finally it traced a general panorama of the situation, admitting that Bulgaria was reluctant to join to the Tripartite Pact and to assume an attitude clearly, but emphasizing that the friendships Hungarian and Rumanian concurred to balance the things: from 13 December German troops moved towards Rumania and the availability

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of the railway nets Hungarian and Rumanian concurred with the Germanic divisions "*to quickly reach the places established for their advance*". And he added:

"(...) Circa the operations that are in sight or that they will be necessary later, in this moment I cannot still say anything. They are presently in course of study. The entity of the forces will be in any case such to not only exclude a reserve, but also one whichever threat of counter maneuver on the flank. It is simply necessary, Duce, that You stabilize your front in Albania, therefore to at least withhold the main part of the Greek and Anglo-Greeks forces (...)"

As far as the Yugoslavia, it had shown a sure disinterestedness. It was trying to earn time, little disposed to an untimely approach to the Tripartite, such that the thing would have resolved itself automatically when the military successes Italian-Germans had created the psychological climate adapted. However the interest of Hitler for the vicissitudes of the war in the Balkans had been from Mussolini of time in time - in relation to the news of the day - implore, considered with coldness, demanded but appreciate. Soon after the message of the Fuehrer, on 1 January he telephoned to Cavallero announcing that it was in preparation in Germany a mountain division, but that it preferred not to see employed it, also not having made opposition to its constitution, and that it had been given the way to the shipment of 50 trains per day towards Rumania, from where in the second fortnight of February would have been delivered the Germanic offensive towards Salonicco. However Gen. Marras, that the evolution of the events followed very carefully and knew well to interpret the thoughts of Hitler and *Oberkommando des Heeres*, a few days after sent a precise relation on the German understandings with respect to Greece:

"Our war against Greece has been strange and irritating to Germany because the development of diplomatic negotiations and combinations to more or less long expiration has hampered destined to develop the German influence in the Balkan peninsula and to assure to the Reich one hegemonic position in all Southeast Europe. For that realistic sense of the situation that always inspires German politics, the surprise and the difficulties have been quickly dominated in order to act positively and to turn the situation to own advantage. Here the idea, ready asserted, of a military participation against Greece direct first of all to get hold of Salonicco.

The confirmation of this fast determination has been had in the conversations of Innsbruck, during which it has turned out clearly that the decision of the participation had been already taken. In this conversation Keitel Marshal has left to understand in way the much obvious desire that the occupation

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

of Salonico it was particularly left to the German forces, suggesting also more that in the future Italian offensive operations, our left wing, occupied Florina, headed towards the south.

The participation for Salonico constitutes the resumption of old aspirations never abandoned and answers to powerful political and economic interests that push the Germany to open an outlet towards the Mediterranean. To this resumption - as I have put in passed evidence in - has contributed in wide leaves the silting up of the operations against England, which the Germany has lead to turn its attention towards Southeast Europe and to the Mediterranean basin, modifying considerably its political and military attitude towards this area. While, in fact initially the Germany had left from the acknowledgment of the Mediterranean which full sphere of Italian influence, the ideas with regard to this have come gradually modified towards a increasing interference in the issues of the Mediterranean, emphasized after the recent Italian military events.

Today pronounce clearly the idea that also for the Germany the Mediterranean is one indispensable way and that therefore the Germany must collect the succession of England, at least for that part that the Duce in his speech left England ("the Mediterranean is for us the life, for England only one road").

One does not loose sight that are necessary in many circumstances clearly to distinguish the thought of the Fuehrer in a determined moment from the managing atmosphere ideas several, expressions of great economic interests and currents diffuse expansionists widely and more and more emphasized, which see the European Neuordnung like one exclusively Germanic function in its substance. And these currents, supported also from elements near the Fuehrer, do not lack to influence the thought of Hitler, which it is in continuous evolution. The importance that assumes for Germany the occupation of Salonico is obvious and explains also as the Reich means to prevent the participation of the Yugoslavia, whose first objective would be exactly the occupation of Salonico.

Another ascertainment is necessary to make for the considerations that they achieve some and for the reflection that it can have on the operations. Germany up to now maintains optimal relations with Greece and this, in its turn, too pains to avoid how much can provoke a German participation. The voices approximately some limitations that Greece would have placed the English competition appear confirmed. Without it is not meant that England has abstained up to now using of the bases in Greek territory in order to act against the oil fields of Rumania, by now controlled from the Germany.

Of other part it is necessary to consider that:

- Greece, of forehead to a Germanic offensive, will feel itself disabled to resist and will be capacity to yield of forehead to the Germans rather than to the Italians, being preferred the German occupation to that Italian; German politics are directed to strengthen this conviction;
- England and Athens if of it renders account - will not have the possibility to defend peninsular Greece of it has the intention to engage many troops to you, but nearly exclusively ready carried out by aviation. No English major unit has been in fact sent into the Greek peninsular. England

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

thinks instead maintaining the Cretan occupation for the advantages that can derive for the control of the Mediterranean and the action against Libya.

In this situation the question is lawful if the Greeks, on the credit side action of German offensive, will oppose serious resistance to Germanic troops or more rather not prefer to limit themselves to a protest or to make a semblance of resistance and to leave way free to the Germans, maintaining concentrated the forces in the Albanian theater in order to slow down our advance and makes to precede given German troops. It would come therefore to lack to Italy the rematch to which it has right.

That independently from the consideration that the German advance, conducted with prevailing forces, armed and well organized, will be expectably very fast and therefore it will be able to not only precede us in the occupation of Salonicco, but also in that one of Athens. It is from finding that the German High command, in considering the eventuality of the shipment of a mountain division to Albania, has expressed the desire that it comes at re-united opportune moment to the German forces operating on Salonicco.

In the situation shown now manifest the necessity of timely political and military agreements with Germany, in order to coordinate the future offensive operations against Greece and to prevent that they carry out themselves from part of the two allies in independent way. The disadvantages of this lacked coordination would be all for Italy. I add that the German High command is of the opinion that will be enough the German offensive to resolve the situation in Greece and that from part of Italy it is sufficient to maintain puts into effect the positions in Albania.

Reassuring:

- the Germany wants to occupy Salonicco;
- the relationship of the forces and the conditions of the land leave to presume that the German advance will be the fastest one than that Italian and that therefore the Germanic forces will be able to reach to Athens before those of the Italians; it is possible that Greece does not mean to oppose serious resistance to the German forces and that it prefers German occupation to Italian;
- it is not therefore to exclude that the German threat carry only a limited lightening of the Albanian front;
- the opportunity of timely political-military agreements for the coordination of the future offensive operations against Greece is shown".

The vision of Mussolini and the report he sent to Cavallero, commenting a lot simply that "*the conclusion is that we must precede the Germans in the work of annihilation of the Greek resistance*".

Meanwhile had arrived in Albania a Germanic military mission guided by Gen. von Rintelen, military attaché of Rome and officer of connection near the Joint Chief of Staff. The visit lasted for a week, during which the attempt of the head was obvious mission to become account - between the other - of the Italian situation in a generalized manner (capacity of ability, possibility of offensive resumption, condition of the logistic apparatus) and in the fields it visits (spirit of the troops, usury of the units, depots adopted, operation of the supply).

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

In his talks with the Italian official companion, Gen. von Rintelen had to explicitly declare "*that none of the German infantry divisions, even if chosen between the most trained, could living and fight in difficult lands therefore*", adding that an eventual struggle of German troops in Albania could be only entrusted to some mountain division.

In Berlin the report of the military mission was awaited with eagerness. After to have examined with accuracy the Italian demands, the evening of 5 January Mar. Keitel had gone to Berchtesgaden in order to introduce concrete proposals to Hitler:

"(...) Nothing it is still known visa vie the decisions with regard to - wrote Gen Marras on 11 January - and is not still known when Mar. Keitel will return to Berlin. All moreover it demonstrates with how much circumstance acts the German Command in this circumstance. The reason of this caution is, as is known, in the worry not to leave the German troops in a risked situation, which can have unfavorable developments for their success and compromise the highest prestige which the Armed Forces of Germany currently enjoy.

To me it turns out that while they have been given the necessary warnings major unit that eventually would come destined in the two new theaters. Without that nothing still has been decided, in sight of this eventual participation, has been today demanded the authorization for the shipment of some officials in recognition to Albania as well as to Libya.

As far as the mountain division that would come sent to Albania, with the exception of what was communicated from Gen. Jodl, who informed that the only division available in this moment would have been the 1st, turns out that it has been designated the 6th to me, commanded from Gen Schoerner, already known in Italy. This division is currently found in eastern Austria and very probably made part of destined major unit to Rumania.

Our situation in Albania, on the basis of the recent report sent by Gen. von Rintelen after his visit to the area, comes here judged as sufficiently stabilized and by now sure, also for the availability of one certain reserve. I think therefore that, where the German Command decided itself to the shipment of this division, of it would demand the employment in direction of Koritza, in sight of the future union with the German forces operating from Bulgaria (...).

On the 17th arrived at Tirana a second German military mission, guided by Col. Jodl⁽⁶⁰⁾, which visited carefully the area of the III Army Corps (Pogradec), then, received from Cavallero, communicated to his own High command previewed the offensive from Albania for

60) Col. Jodl, head of the second German military mission in Albania, was the brother of Gen. Jodl, head of the operations unit of the OKW.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the end of March; however he did not know or he did not want to clear at such time corresponded to the beginning of the operation through Bulgaria. He supplied, in compensation, some element of clarification on the subject to study: it would gladly have seen a mountain Corps with two divisions - rather than one single division - with the task to operate subsequently from the extreme left of the Korça front and on Larissa, with the help of support from part of Italian alpine units on the right. Cavallero did not remain persuaded at all - of satisfied - from a plan of the sort: first of all, it specified, the hypotheses of the Comando Superiore Albania considered advance until to Florina, being the continuation of the operations subordinated to the coordination with the German offensive on Salonico, that it had to form object of agreements between the Supreme Commanders; in the second place, the task of classified support to the Italian troops would have had to carry out in a bitter mountain atmosphere lacking in suitable ways of communication. For how much then it concerned the second mountain division was not being either the case to speak of, because already extreme difficulties existed to conciliate the necessity of supplying of personnel and materials for the units in place with the insufficient abilities of drainage of the ports. Of the front to the evident disappointment of the interlocutor, Cavallero added that in any case the problem would have been subordinate to deepened examination more. Finally Col. Jodl asked if it would have been appreciate the participation of a tank battalion in order to act with the Italian quick troops in Klisura-Premeti direction, in the picture of the offensive on Korça. Cavallero of he gained the impression that was be a matter of a way to lessen the previewed disappointment for the German manifest intention to assume the main part in the future events. In a more detailed talk with the head of the G.S. of the Comando Superiore, the mission head still manifested the conviction of being able to employ a army corps, for how much lightened, and asked if, to such aim, it were possible to use 600 tons of every day drainage in the port of Durazzo. But Col. Bartiromo convinced it that serious obstacles existed to even exceed in the cares of a single division. In fact, known that the division from Germanic mountain had 17,000 men, 6,000 draft animals, 36 guns of bore from the 75 to 149 and 1,500 motor vehicles⁽⁶¹⁾ and holding present of being able to concur

61) Evidently the Mt. Div. in argument was reinforced, however the war personnel of an Italian alp. Div. previewed 14,000 men, 5,300 draft animals, 24 pieces of artillery and 250 motor vehicles.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

a maximum possibility of the drainage of 150 tons per day, calculated not less than fifteen days for the transport in Albania on German ships and moreover approximately two months in order to constitute the wished supplies: 20 daily rations consumptions, 2 days of fire and 5 of fuel, for total 2,500-3,000 tons.

The issue of the cooperation with the Germanic forces coming from Bulgaria was also already be taken in consideration from the Comando Superiore Albania. Considered being necessary to retake Korçano - than naturally it was desirable success before the participation of the ally - five or six divisions and a period of time of a ten of days, the following operations could not begin before 10-12 May, with a availability of four or five divisions. That premised, could be shared the Greek territory in two theaters, assuming as dividing line the chain of the Pindo: Epirus to Italy and Macedonia-Tessaglia to Germany. In such case the Italian action would have been substantially independent and understanding to achieve a full result, but not much express. In alternative, it could be converged, in collaboration with the Germans, on the plain of Larissa. In this hypothesis the Italian forces would have followed the Florina-Kozane-Elasson director (having a single mountain roadway) while those Germans would have headed at Katerine (using more roadways and one railroad).

The common factor was introduced little tempting consideration: in March the Italian situation would have been characterized from four months of winter fight with consequent wearing down, let alone persisting of the noted logistic difficulties, whereas the Germans would have begun the operations with fresh forces, with a railroad at their disposition, against one minimal share of an army already most frayed, therefore they would shiningly have resolved quickly and a problem already started on solution with serious sacrifices from the troops of Albania. And but right to admit that that dramatic situation no one had it less taxing to Italy - the Germans useless - and that Mussolini had tried it with a sudden decision of whose irresponsibility exists rare examples in the history. However, supposed at the same time to begin the two offensives on Korça and Salonicco, it was presumable that the Italian forces reach the Greek border in ten days more or less and that those Germans arrived to the objective (90 km) in one week, and that is in an inferior time to ours for smaller notes operating and logistic difficulties. Being as the things, for advanced following towards Florina would have turned out much opportune

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

the German movement from Salonico towards Florina to cut the communications of Tessaglia with the northern frontiers. In case then the offensive had to continue on Larissa, became indispensable an entire estimate of understandings of political order - supported from the opened German intention to move - apt to allow the constitution of a logistics base in Yugoslavia in the zone of Bitolj, served from the railroad, the only one in a position to feeding the march from Florina to Larissa. The speech remained for the moment without conclusions, in how much the German intentions was not known. To the military mission Cavallero it advanced also the personal idea of an eventual meaningful participation of a Italian division motorized to the operation from Bulgaria, which expression of the military solidarity between the two allies, but the cue - in truth of debatable opportunity - then was not supported from a part receive from any other.

As it has been seen, the entire issue was very complex in its several aspects and military and politicians. The best synthesis in merit is represented from a personal note that Cavallero compiled for Mussolini in sight of the convention fixed for 19 January at Berchtesgaden between the two dictators; convention to which Cavallero had to participate but, replaced at the last moment by Guzzoni because of the events in course in Albania. It was the first time that la presence of a military councilman responsible Italian came of the sort demanded for an encounter, and Gen. von Rintelen, who obeyed to precise orders from Berlin, had been explicit. Main argument had to be Albania and for being put to the current of all the relative war problems to Mussolini well he convened at Foggia, on 14 January, Generals Cavallero, Vercellino and Ranza. In his diary Cavallero is limited to give news of the fact, to synthesize the elements decided in such center on the rearrangement of the forces and to enclose copy of the note;

"The conditions put into effect of major unit on the Albanian front, which have been exposed to You, Duce, from the Commanders of the Armies, the entity of the work to complete in order to reorder the divisions, especially those that have taken part to the withdrawal from the border, the entity of the materials and necessary means to such reordering and the previewed difficulty, for our country, to supply ready these materials and means, they do not concur to think to one fast putting in efficiency here of existing the war organism. Moreover present estates of the deficiency of the street net and the necessity to create in Albania the necessary supplies to the operation, that, previewing supplies also reduced, would demand the much longest time than that one considered.

From the highly summarized calculations that have been made the results that for the indicated age (the end of February) could be remittances in efficiency the alpine units. Also

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

the reordering of some other divisions could be started, but the completion and the remittance in operating efficiency of these units will demand greater time. With the alpine units reordered and completed will be possible; subordinately to the conditions of the climate and therefore of the land, to execute the operation on Korça, but the greater developments that could derive from a collapse of the Greek army, collapse on which we do not have but to count on when we set up the problem of the real possibilities.

It is in fact true that in hand to very long continuously puts into effect them operations as well as more the Greek *army* will be gone *wearing away*, but, while we an offensive to run express demands in the offender therefore a marked superiority of efficiency and of preparation that, like You, Duce will *wear away also*, we have been able to render account to you, we are not possible to catch up *in the* period of time considered. We will be able, *in any case*, to prepare an armored unit (restoration of the *Centauro*) if they come given the tanks to us ready that to it are necessary. We will prepare also motorized with the quick elements in place (bersaglieres) if the country can give the necessary motor vehicles to us for this unit (has already the groups of motorized artillery). Very well mean, if the collapse of the Greek army had to produce, other units could follow the movement.

The exposed premises on, that they are a conscientious representation of the state of fact, suggest some considerations:

1) Where the action in Macedonian was lead in order own account from Germany, the conditions of the land in that region, the number and the freshness of the German divisions and the absence almost total of the opposing forces would make sure to reach to the Germany that succeeded express and of immense development that we could not realize.

2) Find tests the consideration of Gen. Marras that I reproduce here: "In the shown situation manifest the necessity of timely political and military agreements with Germany in order to coordinate the future offensive operations against Greece and to prevent them to carry out themselves from part of the two allies in independent way. The disadvantages of this lacked coordination would be all for Italy ".

On the other hand, if it is true, as it was sure in your thought in October of last year, than the solution of the war it must be searched in the eastern Mediterranean leaving from the Balkan field, appears obvious that Italy has with its on blood opened the way to the Germanic action, since, as well known General Marras, Germany has not been late to draw from our action on Greece the more profitable consequences for own conduct⁽⁶²⁾.

Now, repeating itself from part of the Axis, thanks to our effort, how much was completed *from England* in the last war, could be reach a decisive result here that you weigh definitively on the possibilities of resistance of the common adversary. But that demands, to my subordinated warning, than the coordination of the efforts it is perfect, a lot in the political field that in that military, since every disharmony, also minimal, in the solidarity of this effort can be source of the more serious consequences.

⁶² It is from presuming that Gen. Cavallero for first believed very little to the validity of this thesis and it only pointed out in order to try to offer a small cue; therefore as it is very probable that he did not think either to Mussolini it acceptable.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

I cannot allow me, Duce, to go more beyond in this examination. You allow me to say that the single one way in order resolving the common problem of Italy and Germany is, with my most modest warning, that one to place decidedly endured and without possibility of ambiguous interpretations our effort on the line of the Axis, so that Greece knows that it fights to a time against Italy and Germany. Where the present attitude continued from part of Germany not to hit Greece and this received to its time the German troops without to fight, and that is without hostile attitude, the damage would be incalculable that would derive to our situation and to our military prestige ".

According to Ciano the encounter of Foggia must not have been a very serene. Already before leaving Rome the loss of Klisura had been received with strong recriminations:

"The troops, also those fresh ones, hold until when not manifest the Greek pressure - he wrote - but under the collision they yield and also quickly. Why? Mussolini finds that all the situation is a inexplicable drama, as well as more serious in how much inexplicable. Cavallero, with which I have spoken by telephone, does not hide the moral gravity of the event, but it does not think that the situation of Berat and therefore of Valona is compromised (...) ⁽⁶³⁾.

And so, when he returned to Rome, Mussolini was *dark and pessimist and taken care of the travel in Germany*.

No wonder if two days after, to the departure for Salisburgo:

"Mussolini arrives in dark and nervous train. And shaken from the Albanian news. No drama, but once again we have recoiled and we left many prisoners in hand the enemy. Most serious it is that dealing with the *Lupi di Toscana*, a division of optimal reputation and greater traditions, just arriving in Albania and on which moreover hopes ⁽⁶⁴⁾ had been founded. It speaks long on all that: it repeats its pessimism on the army and the Italian people. It does not know to explain itself because of the things. It often repeats: "If someone, on 15 October, had previewed how much after the event in reality, I would have made it to shoot" ⁽⁶⁵⁾.

Arriving at the station of Push, shortly before coming down from the train, Mussolini it said to Ciano: "*the blood will not be enough to me that I have in the veins in order to blush in front of Hitler*", then, just ambassador Alfieri

63) G. CIANO, op. cit., page 498.

64) The speech on the disappointment provoked from the unhappy test of a division of optimal reputation is, must say it, rather superficial. Burden to reflect on the fact that the unit had been reduced almost to zero from the demobilization, remittance with to the better with a frantic remobilization and finally employed without ever being to the complete. The solidity of the previous ones is not worth for the eternity if not the cure in the due way. Never a soccer team resists of the sort after organic vicissitudes!

65) G. CIANO, op. cit., pag. 500.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

was introduced, to Berghof, for signifying that the state of mind of the Fuehrer was very disposed to *eventual demands* of the front, interrupted it dryly: "*I do not have anything to ask!*"⁽⁶⁶⁾, In the afternoon meeting of those two days was faces the arguments of military character; Hitler spoke long about the next German participation in the Balkans, illustrating with abundance of details a such picture of modern power and efficiency inflicting to its host *one true and own physical suffering*. In the preliminary conversations Mar. Keitel and Gen. Jodl returned on the offer of a army corps with 30,000 men, with two well equipped mountain divisions. The retort of Gen. Guzzoni was in tune with all the reasoning and considerations that previously have been brought back: to the maximum conveniently lightened could be sent one division. All adding, for the Albanian theater concrete decisions were not had, at least to short expiration; in compensation they were some for Libyan, to which the armored forces were destined that then took the name of German Africa Corps.

Also Greece asked itself and as Germany would have made headway. Since the beginning of the hostilities, and cleared that Bulgaria did not have, for the moment at least, some intention to participate to the conflict on the side of Italy, the government of Athens and the Greek High command had to consider the probability that the Germany took part directly, alone or being dragged with Bulgaria. The plans are known study you from the Greek General Staff and also it has been seen as unexpected the favorable course of the operations in the Albanese theater had induced to reach more and more to the eastern frontier in order to reinforce the troops in western Macedonian and Albania and in order to carry out substitutions of major unit. Naturally Gen. Papagòs became account not to be able to proceed in contrary sense in case the war was burst also on the Thracian - Macedonian front, in how much it would have loosened the grip towards Valona and Berat renouncing the possible victory without to resolve anything to east because of the sure and disproportionate inferiority of forces and means to a German attack, much more than this it would have been sure coordinated with an analogous Italian effort towards the Epirus and Tessaglia.

"For these reasons - Papagos wrote - the Greek High command decided to continue to exercise its main effort on the theater of operations

66) D. FLAGMEN, op. cit., page 113.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Albanian also in the case of a German participation. The Greek army would have had at all costs to conserve the position of the winner in the case of the Italians, any had been the conclusion of the operations on Bulgarian front"⁽⁶⁷⁾.

The renunciation to defend in practice the eastern frontier but was alleviated much from the hope of allying, which Great Britain, the Yugoslavia or Turkey. While from part of before a various competition from aids in arms, materials and means was difficult to await less - than favorable events in North Africa, perhaps the second one constituted the wished perspective more: its participation would have concurred the fast conclusion of the fight in Albania and an availability of such forces that, in this case, for sure would have received more consisting an aid than British troops against the Germans or the Bulgarian-Germans. In any case clear understanding with English was determining one. When, on 5 January, fell Bardia and Tobruk appeared to "*in the hand*", Churchill manifested his point of view on the Balkan theatre to Gen. Ismay, Imperial Chief of the G.S.. Premised to think that a German initiative would probably have had place before the spring, it found the large contribution brought to the cause allied from the Greek army, although the limited aid in aircrafts given to them:

" (...) 13. All at the time to conclude that a Greek failure of the offensive on Valona would have most serious consequences. It can be that general Wavell, without other forces that those of which it currently arranges in the western desert and in spite of some reduction in his air forces, succeed to conquer Cyrenaica and to become part in Bengasi; but it would not be right that for he is bound to give up to the probability that the Greeks take Valona, with the result to lose their heart and to perhaps afflict them and reduce them to such conditions of spirit for asking Italy a separate peace. The eventuality must therefore be looked on to that after taken of Tobruk the further advance towards the West of the army of the Nile can meet serious obstacles. For me it is clear that the aid to Greece must have the precedence not just the western flank of Egypt has been consolidated.

14. On the attitude of the Yugoslavia the support can have a decisive influence that we will give to the Greek army and the fortune of this last one in front of Valona. It is true that it is impossible to make dogmatic affirmations; it seems however that the Germans push themselves until to the Black Sea through Rumania and press on Salonicco through Bulgaria, they more natural old ally, rather than to force the passage through the Yugoslavia. Various movements of troops and voices still more numerous would seem to confirm it. It is obvious that

67) A. PAPAGOS, op. cit., page 104-105.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

they are in course, from the German part, intense preparations of the troops and improvements of the communications with Southeastern Europe. We must act so as to render the participation in war of Turkey in the case sure that the enemy enters in Bulgaria. If the Yugoslavia holds head and it does not come annoyed, if the Greeks take Valona and remain in Albania, if Turkey becomes active allying, that could influence favorably on the attitude of Russia. Anyone can see how much dangerous, indeed fatal, can succeed for Russia a German advance until to the Black Sea or, through Bulgaria, until to the Aegean Sea. Only the fear will withhold Russia from the war and probably a solid forehead allied in the Balkans, with the crescent prestige of the army, aviation and navy of Great Britain, will be able to attenuate such fear. We do not have to make but assignment on this hypothesis (...) ⁽⁶⁸⁾.

On the German preparations all the information that flowed to London agreed, indeed they indicated that the more probable period was the beginning of March. Eden, like Churchill, was however sure that the Germans "*must make every effort in order to anticipate such movement*" because "*we can be sure that the Germany will try to take part with the force in order to avoid complete Italian unraveling in Albania*" ⁽⁶⁹⁾.

On 8 January the Committee of the chiefs of general staff gathered and expressed the opinion that was indispensable to act at once for giving the greater possible support to the government of Athens. In concrete the aid could catch up the maximum limit of one squadron of heavy tanks, of one *regiment* of cruisers, ten groups of artillery and five squadrons of aviation. The *immediately* time of agreement for after the fall of Tobruk. The worse hypothesis represented from the possibility of an operation lead from Germanic part with or two armored divisions and a division motorized approximately 180 *Stuka* and some parachutists units even before the end of January.

"(...) If not halted - Churchill wrote - to Wavell on 10 January forces could exactly provoke in Greece the same consequences that the Sedan breakthrough operated to by the German army had in France. All the Greek divisions in Albania would find themselves in a deprived of hope position. These are the facts and the consequences that turn out from our information, to which have good reasons in order to believe. But he is not also just that that the Germans would have to make in order to bring the greater possible damage to us? The annihilation of Greece would exclude the victories from you brought back in Libya and could influence in decisive way on the Turkish attitude, especially if we will have shown ourselves little caring of the fate of allies. Therefore you must now to adapt your plans to more interests to you game.

68) W. CHURCHILL, the second world war, p. "111, vol. I, page. 28-29.

69) *Ibid*, page. 33.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

3. Nothing must prevent the taking of Tobruk, but not hardly that is happened, all the operations in Libya is subordinated to the aid Greece; from the moment in which you will receive this telegram the preparations you must be made all in order to help immediately Greece until to the prescribed limits (...).

4. We attend and demand a ready obedience and active to our decisions, of which we carry the entire responsibility. The visit that for the occasion you will make to Athens will put you in a position to clearing the better method for giving execution to the reported decisions over. You would not have to delay it " ⁽⁷⁰⁾.

As a result of that the Gen. Wavell and the Mar. Longmore left for Athena. The encounter lasted two days, the 14 and 15 January. Metaxas wanted to outline the Balkan political picture: it exposed the conviction that, in all probability, in case of German participation is the Yugoslavia is Turkey would not have been detached from neutral position and would have conserved the line of prudent attended up to now continuation; he emphasized that the Yugoslavia would not have appreciate the disembarkation of British troops on the Greek ground for fear hurrying the outbreak of the war in all the Balkans; he confirmed that Greece would be itself opposite with every means to a German aggression and Bulgarian-German. For his part Gen. Papagos exposed the military aspects of the problem: in Rumania they turned out arrived a dozen of divisions already, of which two or three armored, concentrated essentially in Valacchia, beyond to a large contingent of air forces; in Bulgaria they had been reports of German officers in civilian clothes particularly interested to airports, roads, bridges on the Danube. All it was more than eloquent approximately the Germanic intentions. From Greek part it existed very little. On the eastern frontier, beyond to the garrisons of the fortifications were only remained four divisions (the 7th, the 12th, the 14th and, for a short time still, 6th), for arriving lacking in some regiment also sent into Albania ⁽⁷¹⁾. Of it derived that the defense of eastern Macedonian and of western Thrace it was feasible only in case the Greek units had been reinforced very soon with nine British divisions and adapted air forces. In according to time it could have thought to a "*further strengthening of these forces*". Papagos, than evidently considered the question like easily-granted wish from part of Great Britain, specified moreover the necessity to realize convenient conditions of rapidity of disembarkation and safety.

70) W. CHURCHILL, op. cit., p. 111, vol. I, page. 38.

71) In Albania 12 divisions and 3 brigades of infantry were found, 1 division and 1 brigade of cavalry.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

In the impossibility to make to flow "at once" all these troops, suggested to make to disembark them as soon as not taken place the German entrance into Bulgaria, but before the assumption of the attack device. To such goal it was necessary to secretly supply quickly and to the air defense of the Macedonian ports and Thracians, to the construction or to the improvement of the indispensable airports considered, to the constitution of the escort for all the British expeditionary corps, to the concentration in Egypt of all the forces already predisposed for the boarding (giving to see of being prepared for the continuation of the fight in Tripolitania), to the reunion in the ports of the eastern Mediterranean of the being necessary transport ships. To part a sure contrast at assert between - from part of Metaxas - the disapproval of the government of Belgrade for the presence of English troops in Greece and the affirmation of Gen. Papagos that "in case this operation for the strengthening of Greece had been realized, could have provoked also a change of the political situation, making to change the attitude of the Yugoslavia and Turkey in our favor" ⁽⁷²⁾, astonish demanded therefore manifestly onerous of a front to equally the clear impossibility materials from English part to satisfy it.

Wavell was adhered to the received directives: he explained that same it had been forced to lead the operations in Cyrenaica with forces relatively limited and that was not absolutely from thinking feasible the design proposed from the Greek General Staff. A counteroffer went little indeed beyond the mandate, pushing to two or three divisions with an small aerial contingent. However, he held to specify, the single concentration of the divisions in the boarding ports demanded a remarkable time and more or less another two months were estimated necessary for the transport in Greece, given the deficiency of mercantile ships. At the moment he could offer simply those few that it had been established from the Committee of the Chiefs of the G.S. For the Greeks was a true disappointment and Metaxas declared without absolutely insufficient periphrasis the useful competition of two or three divisions and more dangerous that the shipment of unit of artillery and a few tanks, in how much would have simply give the result to offer to the Germans the justification of the aggression. After all thanking him and he refused the counteroffer.

If the official talk finished with the declarations of Metaxas, the contact had an appendix: before leaving again for the Cairo Wavell he returned from Papagos suggested that from London he had been telegraphed

72) A. PAPAGOS, op. cit., pag. 110.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to little insist for the acceptance of those aid that Great Britain was in a position to offer immediately. Papagos, that it had objected to not be able - to answer since the subject exited the distinctly military field, went to the head of the government in order to put him to the current of the issue and in order to renew his opposition to the English disembarkation to those conditions. The reasons were political: if it appeared reasonable to await that a conspicuous expeditionary corps would in all probability have influenced in favorable sense on the attitude of Yugoslavia and Turkey, a small contingent, than could resolve nothing, would have been expectably cause of a hardening in the position of neutrality assumed from the two states if not, quite, it would have negatively influenced their relationships with Athens:

"I insisted near the Head of the Government because he convinced the English on the uselessness of an aid in our cares carried out in these conditions. If it were not resolutions to convince the English was unadvisable, for reasons of political opportunity, to oppose a categorical refusal to the British offer (...). I think that the insistence of the British Government for the shipment at all costs of a contingent of English troops to Greece had first of all the goal to demonstrate to public opinion that England faithfully maintained its promises of aid and put to disposition of Greece all the forces of which it could decide in that moment " ⁽⁷³⁾.

Metaxas was found in a rather embarrassing situation. He had declared officially that Greece would be itself opposite with every means to a Germanic aggression, therefore could not refuse the two or three English divisions without to run the risk to provoke doubts on his true understanding to resist. Great Britain had, for its part, too many times repeated that Greece would have to be helped, therefore could not leave that it was gained assisting passively to the tragedy. Of an army of nine divisions was not even the case to speak, of a small army corps was not possible to think that it was resolute. The English presence would have supply to the Germans the formal excuse in order to take sides, the English absence would have induced them. Of the three adjacent States, the only one of which was nearly sure the behavior was Bulgaria: one would be to time debit put in line with Germany. Metaxas was finally resolved to reject the offer of the artillery regiments and of the unit of the tanks, asking but the participation as soon as the Germans entered Bulgaria. To London the Committee of Defense limited itself to first record the answers of Wavell and the Greek government

73) A. PAPAGOS, op. cit., pag. 113-114.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

then, and decided to leave to fall the argument; it brought back therefore every attention on Libya with the warning to order to the preparation in the region of the delta of the Nile of a strategic reserve of four divisions for one possible future shipment to Greece or Turkey.

For the Greek High command another problem was placed now: the study of like employing the English aid once the German movement into Bulgaria had rendered it operating. Visa vie the defense of the Bulgarian frontier, for which the planning contemplated *a minimum of twelve divisions*, they were not likely available that five or six divisions: three Greeks and as many, in the best hypotheses, British. A number totally insufficient to protect western Thrace and the eastern Macedonian, than therefore it induces – come to consider a heroic solution, that one to abandon part of the Greek territory that is supporting the defense to the Smolika-Mount Olympus line. But, however the various suppositions were taken an examination, existed a preliminary knot untie and such knot was political: the position of the Yugoslavia. Neutral, allied or enemy? Until a clarification in merit had not come, any military decision would have been not only most difficult, but if taken independently, it could also have had serious repercussions in the political area⁽⁷⁴⁾. On 29 January Metaxas died.

74) A. PAPAGOS, op. cit., page. 116-120.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

CHAPTER X

THE BATTLE OF TEPELENI
(February-March 1941)

1. THE REARRANGEMENT OF THE 11th ARMY.

On 10 February Cavallero was called urgency by Mussolini. Arrived in airplane to Bari and continued then at once for Bisceglie, he had a talk of approximately four hours, in the course of which he illustrated in immense panoramic an operating moment *"putting in evidence that on 4 December we were on the hem of the catastrophe, while today in we are at a decided advantage"*, therefore passed to precise subjects. First of all the issue of the callbacks to arms: he had prepared a note in purpose and one hurried to put it on the table, being emphasized the cases of the *Lupi della Toscana*, the *Legnano* and the *Cagliari* and concluding:

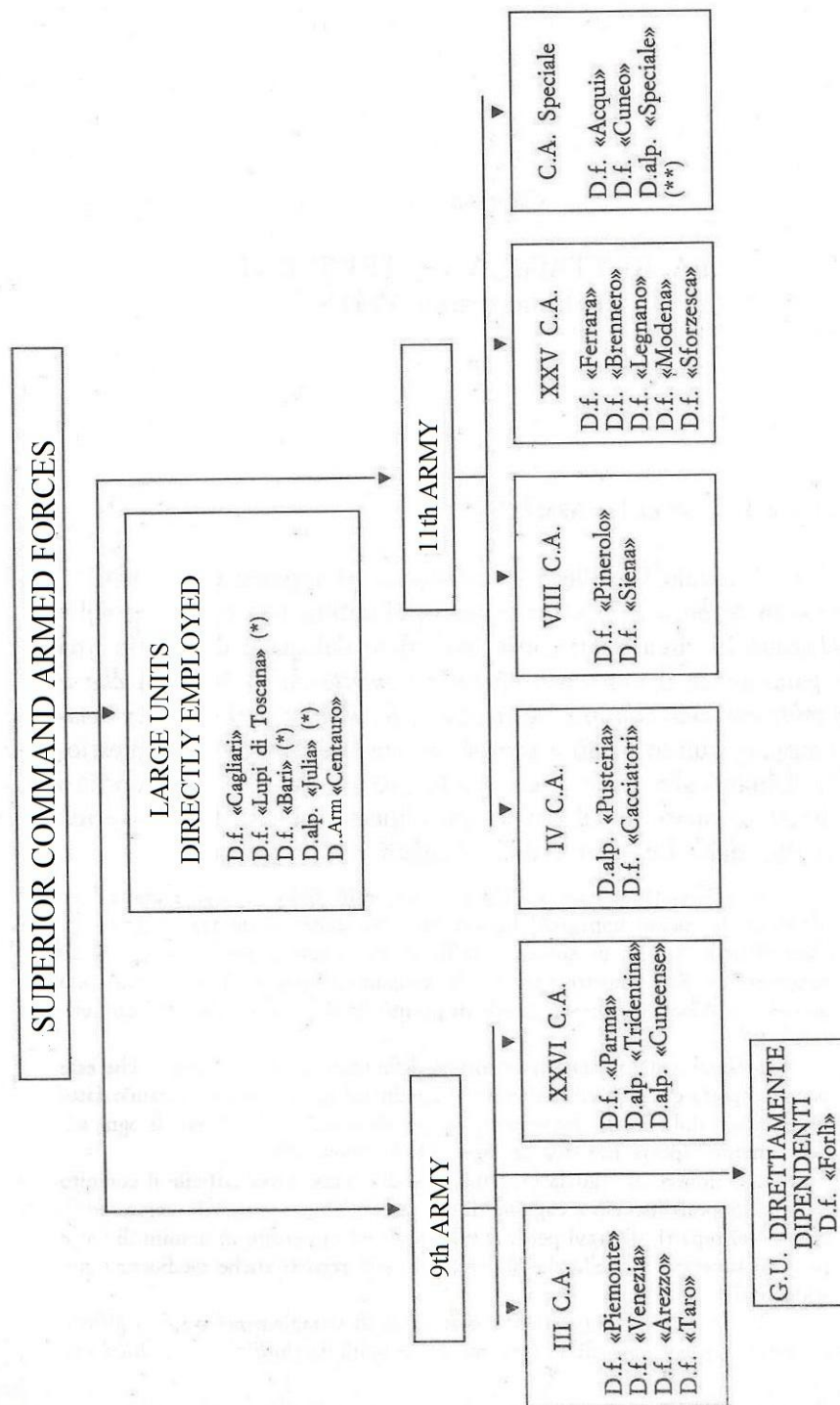
"(...) I cannot keep quite, Duce, than this state of things is serious and if it is believed that we are engaged in a hard battle, in a theatre of much difficult war, against an enemy who has reserves to devout of work, at least would be necessary that our reserves, that they come through the sea, once arrived in Albania were introduced of ready employment. That has never been taken place.

To the damage of the hurried constitution of the said units to add that they come burdened to number recalling men and officers who have not done any military service for a long time and therefore practically lacking in every training, especially for that concerning the new arms.

I have the duty to signal to you, Duce, than that it renders the task of all very difficult. Above all that is cause of insufficient consistency and therefore insufficient rendering of the units, of serious losses in officers and losses in much advanced men of troop to whom they would have been mediocre with units also trained.

They have been announces 15 battalions of complements little or at all it trained; these battalions serve for the units to reorder and will be used

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14



(*) In reorganization under the control of Gen. Negro

(**) The Command was one of Mot. Div. "Trieste"

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

in the better way. But it is necessary that further sending of complements are made with trained men and therefore featured from classes that have had recent callbacks, having itself to feed also the units online that are subject to express wearing down and would have otherwise to be withdrawn from the front, while there is not a way to replace them.

I must in synthesis confirm the urgent necessity that is modified the criterion that presides to the callbacks of the officers and the troop. I become account that can be raised objections of social order, but task that the damage to which we expose ourselves persevere in puts into effect the system is too much serious because those objections do not have to be in some old way " ⁽¹⁾.

He then touched other important issues, between which the Greek situation of the pictures and major unit, the two counter opposing alignments, tactical procedures and finally the participation of aviation in the battle, with specific reference to the most insufficient number of bombers in Albania. Action taken Mussolini of all and promised his personal interest in order to heal the disadvantages indicated u. He returned to Tirana, the Supreme Commander hurried to go to the 11th Army whose alignment to wedge with the XXV Corps, to the center, pushed in front and with the wings, constituted from the special army corps on the right and by the VIII and IV Corps on the left, much pulled away, introduced dangers and advantages that they formed an object of careful screening from part of Gen. Geloso. It was of great usefulness, and the operation on Klisura of had been a test, the relative facility of maneuver from the zone to back of Tepeleni on the flank of the enemy, that it had already removed to this last possibility to continue the promising offensive therefore along the valleys Deshniçes and the Mali. It existed for against the danger, already pointed out, of an attempt of the adversary of cut at the base the salient, therefore to achieve greater freedom of action and to arrive to the conquest of Tepeleni, that it would have represented a result, also moral, of large relief. The attack tending to such goal could not, to this point of the campaign, to take place on that eastern flank of the salient. The defense, in fact, on the right flank of the XXV Corps and on the front of the special Corps, to obstruction of the road of the Sushica valley and of the shoreline for Valona, they had reached such total degree of efficiency to extremely render doubtful the probability of Greek success; moreover the mass of the Greek forces was gravitating already in the zone of Klisura and the Deshniçes valley and they movement would have demanded enormous time that would have gone to all advantage of the defense. Finally, on the eastern flank of the Luftinja valley, which

1) Cavallero diary, date 1.2.1.941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

it could be approached from the hilly land of the Arze, represented a facilitation line that could have opened the road for a great success. But the Greeks could not more hope in the annihilation of the Italian forces, because the continuous one influx of units from Italy, also with the deficiencies notes, had concurred the constitution of reserves with which to maneuver and to accept battle, where became necessary, also in open field. The Greek army instead had online all its units and the German threat, than already was outlined, prevented to remove from the Bulgarian and the Macedonian border the last forces remaining. Consequently, the Commander of the 11th army determined to reinforce the XXV and VIII Corps in order to allow them to improve, with an action of attack, the local defense and to collect the mass of the reserves in the zone of Berat, therefore from quickly being able to maneuver on the flank of the enemy whom he tried to push itself on the Arze.

Geloso exposed to Cavallero the directives of principle given to Gen. Rossi and Bancale for the employment respectively of the *Sforzesca* and the *Cagliari*. First had to be oriented to retake of the crossroads of Klisura, in simultaneousness of times with the retaking of the north tip of Trebeshines (hill 1308) and of its eastern slopes (Chiaf and Lusit) entrusted to the *Cagliari*, than in the meantime it would have been approached the position of resistance also to precautionary scope. Cavallero approved but for the *Sforzesca*, that it was already in the central zone in the field of the XXV Corps, expressed the understanding that came considered unit of maneuver in the cares of the delicate points of the Arze, of Klisura, Tepeleni and also of Sushica valley. With the occasion arrived the demand for Geloso to carry out the substitution of Gen. Bancale with Gen. Gambarà, as soon as he arrived in Albania.

The VIII Corps was, in that period, constituted only two divisions, both online and both incomplete under the profile of the organic units and the level of force: the *Pinerolo* and *Siena*⁽²⁾, lined up from Bregu Shalesit comprised to the northern slopes of the Mali Trebeshines: a insufficient ten of kilometers online of air. One did not deal of positions very forts, but for the truth nor weak; the feature that aroused some worry, because bordering with the XXV Corps, was that one of the Arze, already down and out from the Greeks on the Trebeshines and for which it had been organized a specific field with machine-gun Bns and camicie nere units. The task of the army corps was the

2) In particular *Siena* was lacking the regiment of artillery, replaced by the II/131st of the *Centauro* with two bty., and of the units of the engineers.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

defensive to the bitter end, "*to maintain at whichever cost the effective positions*", but it was necessary at the same time that the attitude to assume came imprinted to such elasticity to allow to move ready, in tune with the XXV Corps, when it was reached the moment. Purpose of Commander of the army was logical and clearly suggested from circumstances, but, while on the map substantial difficulties did not emerge in order to realize what in depth was a rectifies of the line to improvement of the defensive possibilities, to the practical action the simple retaking of some position turned out an enterprise advanced to the offensive ability to the protagonists. In the turn of two weeks, in fact, will change the Commander of the army corps, will flow the *Cagliari* but the planned action will remain in desires and, for the arrival of, the new division will come inserted in the first formation. The fact is that, to part the useful events but evidently reconstitution of the irresolute cc.nn. legions, whose battalions were scatters on all the fronts, the threat of a new Greek effort of the Deshnices valley provoked at once a series of defensive countermeasures.

Since 4 February heavy opposing pressure had been manifested, is also to irregular intervals, on Bregu Shalesit, defended very well by the 13th infantry. The course of the fight had concluded itself nearly always to favor of the Italian units, however to price of a not indifferent wear & tear. Initially therefore *Cagliari* was oriented to take part from zone of Paraboar (to flank of the IV Corps) towards extreme right of the *Cacciatori delle Alpi*, then the IV Corps received order to prepare to counterattack on the flank of eventual enemy penetration in field of VIII Corps, while to analogous south maneuver came decided from part of the XXV that had to use the *Sforzesca*, to the assigned need. But Gen. Gambarà, that on 5 February had replaced Gen. Bancalè, meant to realize a various alignment entrusting the static defense of the entire front to the *Pinerolo*, reinforced by all the cc.nn. Bns and the infantry-support weapons units available, and to collect the *Siena* in second formation in order to replace it in sixth. In such a way the line turned out articulated in three regimental fields: to north the 13th infantry reinforced; to the center the 14th reinforced; to south, in correspondence of the Arze, a machine-gun battalion and a cc.nn. battalion, to the West of Chiaf Cmciccut the *Siena*.

The news visa via a imminent new Greek attack and, converged, the *Pinerolo* to say again a lot of the losses endured in the last days were made more and more insistent. To the demand for the 11th Army to carry online the *Cagliari* in order to eliminate worries (10 February),

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Cavallero made to answer affirmatively. The Comando Superiore had emanated directive n. 14 ⁽³⁾. That period was not being a matter of changes regarding the previous since all was essentially of arrangement and rearrangement. Daily flowed complements and unit of support; the divisions in reconstitution were being completed and training; the main net of the muleteer in the fields of the XXV, VIII and IV Corps was in gasping improvement with civilian laborer and engineer units.

Also the logistic situation shown from Quartermaster General, also still being very little satisfactory⁽⁴⁾, could acknowledge progress.

Gen. Scuero counted of having the G.U. reordered towards the end of the month and therefore to obtain for such period a greater cargo space availability on the steamboats in order to reach an adequate level of supplies for the Intendancy. But the service transports remained the problem of the problems. The situation was such to even complicate and to render the refueling material unsatisfactory of which availability existed.

For the mules, the *Julia* was in order to receive two baggage train columns with which it would have practically caught up the organic level, but for the other divisions it was in course the collection of the draft animals in the local area, with many reserves on the possibilities to find as much as necessary. Therefore it was well to orient itself to confer to the G.U. an efficiency degree, in this field, in proportion to the presumable employment. All adding, Cavallero hoped of having complete, for the great offensive, the five divisions in rearrangement, the *Piemonte* and the *Parma* and a pair of G.U. between the last ones arrived. With respect to the motor vehicles, Gen. Scuero wished to reach an availability of 2,000 trucks (efficient, of course) to level Intendenza Superiore, for the previewed lengthening of the routes of refueling and evacuation, but it was necessary to improve also the situation of the Armies, in whose within the Commands more elevated they appropriated - obviously for being able to face necessity of blanket order - few means remained to the employee units and in such a way who ended in order to suffer more was the battalions, above all if removed from the regimental organism.

3) DSCSFAA, f. 01753/op. dated 7.2.1941.

4) The regiments from more time online were in particular suffering. The commander of the 48th infantry wrote on the daily history: "*the conditions of the clothing are pitiful, especially as far as the shoes. Some soldiers are with the feet rapped in sandbags and it is not known as supplying!*".

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

As far as the ports, their increase of potentiality effectively was remarkable, however *"the troops grow, the needs increase and the safety margin is disappearing. We have supplies for the life but not for the offensive. It is necessary for this to increase the efficiency of the ports, that it is being made, but also to diminish the affluence of the units so as to assign a part of the extraordinary transports to the transport for the supplies"*.

Cavallero, than nearly every day saw units in the rears and he was stopped to speak with that mainly they had supported the weight of the fight, to say the true one entering sometimes also in the sphere of attributions of the main subordinate commanders, altogether was satisfied, as much by telephone to Mussolini:

"I communicate the item if news of the day: small favorable tactical actions, one position taken by us. Index of resumption. The Greeks still attack but they do not have more force: their attacks are always on small fronts. It does not have but to be, too much optimistic; we will have to still wait for some to us their effort. Of the rest we have divisions in power, ready for the employment. Spirit of troops and services improved. Logistic situation in progress. Geloso says to me that regarding three months time it seems of being in paradise. On the whole satisfactory situation (...). Between ten - fifteen days I will have four reordered major units and better and more complete than those that come from Italy. With these I will be able to make resumption (...)"⁽⁵⁾

Therefore, in connection with the combats in course to the head of the Deshnicas, was necessary hold out in the conditions for counter maneuver in order to eliminate eventual bending and for throw behind the enemy, whose device according to the reconstruction of the intelligence appeared strong and threatening:

- of front to the *Cacciatori* the Greek 11th Inf. Div. with 13th, 50th and perhaps 90th infantry (in truth was the 13th, 50th and the 66th);
- of front to the VIII Corps the 15th Inf. Div. with 28th, 33rd and perhaps 90th infantry (in truth 28th, 33rd and various units) and good part of the 1st constituted from 4th, 16th, 27th, and 51st infantry (in truth 4th, 5th, 7th, 16th, and 51st);
- of front to the extreme left of XXV Corps the 5th and 7th regiments of which belonging (in truth were uncertain were on the northern Trebeshines and frame to the bulk of the 1st Inf. Div.).

In order to block any possible Greek success in those features, to the *Sforzesca*, already to disposition of the 11th Army, the Comando Supremo added, as it has been said, the *Cagliari* and Gen. Geloso ordered

5) Cavallero diary, date 8.2.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Gen. Gambarà in such a way to insert the new division on left to strengthen the P.R.: the *Pinerolo* was shrunk towards south to obstruction of the director of Chiaf Chiciocut; the *Cagliari* was offered on the Shalesit with a second group put in a position to eventually being able to take part in the zone of welding with the IV Corps; the *Siena*, completely withdrawn from the line, had for the moment to be concentrated around Gllava and to be started here on the own base in the rears of the Army for reorganization. Also the system of the transmissions had caught up a sufficient consistency nearly everywhere, to part the necessity of regulating the connection better radio that, for being all the stations in continuous listen to, feel the effects of the heavy consumption of batteries not easy overcome with the ordinary supply.

To the extreme left of the 11th army, the IV Corps astride of the Osum, with the *Pusteria* always supported to the Tomori and the *Cacciatori* along the water course until to Chiaf Bubesit. The first was rather worn out but it did not seem to have strong reasons of worry, with the exception made for the momentary tactical communication with the same *Parma* of the XXV Corps, because of the front to the Greek was only marked 66th infantry. For the *Cacciatori* the discourse was more complex. In the last week of January it had lost in altogether little shining way, even if with many attenuating, Mali Spadarit, Chiaf Murit and Bregu Gliulei and the beautiful conduct of the II/52nd, than in order more days had persevere in an upset fight and rejected various assaults, had not been sufficient to avoid a passive balance. Gen. Mercalli was taken part hardly and, not hardly collection the unit on more rear positions, drew the conclusions of the event ordering to the commander of the division to prepare and to organize to retake the strong point of Bregu Gliulei, most important for the functions of hinge with the positions of Chiaf Bubesit on the right and Chiaf and Trepelit on the left. The problem had two aspects, one psychological and one operating. Under the psychological profile some considerations could not be ignored:

"After the painful experience of these last times - Gen. Mercalli wrote to Geloso - deriving above all from the employment of two new divisions arriving from Italy and also holding account that has been employed, for necessity of things, prematurely when troop leaders were some sufficiently oriented, acclimatized and trained for this special hard war and incomplete of artilleries, baggage train and services, it can and it must be concluded without fear of error that these troops reach from Italy with a combative spirit much reduced.

The causes: far of such bitter ascertainment it is not the case to examine here

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

and that will make object of meditation to completed and gained war. Vice versa I think that it must be resorted to the shelters, without to lose a minute, by all means available.

The work of moral education, healthy propaganda, of moral attendance, etc is already in action near the troops for work of the inferior leaders from we invites, indeed pushes to carry out it with faith and passion without limits, with all the understanding of the high post in game for the future destinies of the home land. But for troops online and for more to tightened contact with the enemy the thing is not easy and therefore profitable as it needs. It is only an impression, but founded enough and diffused that it must have the courage to declare, even if ingrate, even if bitter, even if constitutes a disappointment (...)"⁽⁶⁾.

And on the key of the action of command necessary in order to exceed the moral uncertainty than leek from many symptoms the Commander of the IV Corps will insist for all the month but, perhaps for some rhetorical accent not just in tune to the contingencies, it turns out will be a little late, since the subordinate commanders, simply calculating the relationship between the counter opposing forces - and those adversaries were known enough well, thanks to the prisoners captured from the patrols and to the deserters, very the probabilities of succeeding for the indicated action saw how much were insufficient.

It was dealt, in other words, to invest and to attack in depth Bregu Gliulei with five battalions of infantry and two of camicie nere, at the same time from north and the south-west so as to envelop the position and falling on its rear; and with the 11th alpine to march decidedly on Mali Spadarit, to obstruction of the left river of the Osum. In total nine Bns. and four groups, strong and concentrated mass, whose participation had a single delicate point, and therefore to study well: the coordination of the two columns of the *Cacciatori* in order to avoid a countermove of the enemy from a central position; but the land was lend to the performance of such design and the support of the artillery always could be assured without great difficulties. With the arrival, previewed within 5 February, of the mountain group *Valle Isonzo* and of the complements for the *Trento* and *Bassano* Bn. of the 11th alpine "*you will have all the forces in order to put into effect in the more opportune moment and than surprised this operation that will carry us of course to the coveted re-establishment of the situation and even also beyond - Gen. Mercalli wrote to the. Pivano - It is necessary but to prepare it and to organize it in the tiniest particular (...). Make me know when you will be ready (...) holding very present that does not have to be moved without being absolutely well prepared;*

6) DS Commando IV army corps, f. 01/7 36 date 2.2.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

but he does not have not to wait for too much in order not to be prevented by enemy"⁽⁷⁾.

The commander of the *Cacciatori* formulated at once some objections: he had eight Bns. altogether, of which the III/51st and particularly the III/52nd were tired; the *Trento* Bn. was reduced to 150 men efficient and the *Bassano* to approximately 200; the cc.nn. legion had been withheld by the 11th Army Commander and therefore he turned out unavailable.

For against the adversary infantry had on the Mali Spadarit a Bn of 500, on the ridge of the Bregu Gliulei three Bns of the 900 and at the head of the Deshnicas valley three Bns of 33rd infantry. Beyond to these was necessary to consider the 13th infantry towards the Spadarit and the 28th in the zone of Chiaf and Murit. In short it was a matter of the 11th Inf. Div. and part of the 15th Inf. Div.. For such considerations, and once joints the complements and introduce in the regiments, seemed preferable to limit the attack to Bregu Gliulei, leaving Mali Spadarit as eventual objective. The argument constituted reason of examination and of arguments in order nearly all the month because the necessities to reorder of the units and the withdrawal of the 139th Bn. and of the *Val Chiese* from the line they rendered unavoidable to orient itself to send back the action to the end of the second decade of February. However also for the fire support the situation was unsatisfactory. The commander of the artillery, in fact, examined the characteristics of the groups of the regiment of assigned army corps, perceived that the usable zones of alignment toed be distant from the line of resistance from the eight to the twelve Km, with consequent no possibilities for howitzers from 149/13 (the maximum throw 8,700 m) and insufficient ones for the guns from 105/28 (the maximum throw 12,700 m). With also long and onerous work of street systemizing the effectiveness of participation of said artilleries would not be reached that the Bregu Gliulei, without some possibility of counter-battery. It was therefore necessary to arrange at least one group of 152/37.

More to south, practically to the center of the army, was found the XXV Corps, whose responsibility went from the Arze to the Kundreviça, an immense semicircle subdivided between an alpine tactical complex to the left extreme and then, in the order, the *Legnano*, the *Ferrara*, the *Modena* and the *Brennero*. In consequence of the events taken place during the month of January it had been arranged the constitution of a defensive flank in connection with the right of the VIII Corps. Established to the line hill 1308 of the Trebeshines-Arza of middle of the-Muric;aj limit of the field between

7) DS Commando IV army corps, f. 01/730 date 2.2.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the two army Corps, Gen. Rossi decided of make use of the ridge of the Mali Shendeli - Mali Beshishtit which axis of the P.R. and conserving on the Trebeshines the occupation of the heights remained in Italian possession, is in order to hold the adversary under a continuous threat to his left flank, is for having - more far away possible from the position of resistance and on the same line of departure of eventual enemy attacks directed towards the Shendeli - observation posts actions to control the Greek activity and to work timely from alarm bells. Moreover to the zone of safety, rather deep, was entrusted also task of defense to determined time to allow the sufficient strengthening of the resistance position. From 1 February therefore the eastern alignment of the army corps comprised (sketch n. 87):

1) independent field Arza-Muriçaj (battalion *Monte Ceroino* reinforced by a company of the *Val Cismon* and the *Bolzano*) with the onerous assignment to hold the crest of the Trebeshines, more or less in correspondence than Arza di Sopra, in a salient to contact with the Greek positions to - north (hill 1308) and to east (eastern slopes of the chain). The contiguous connection with the VIII Corps was strengthened of the rear grouping "Galbiati";

2) field of the *Legnano*, subdivided in three sub sectors: "Vojussa" (67th infantry and 26th legion cc.nn.) with the task to block the Mezgoranit valley, this task also very difficult for the subjection of height regarding all the central feature of the Trebeshines; bottom Vojussa valley obstruction, entrusted to the 2nd bersaglieres with a tank unit; "Zagorias" (68th infantry less a Bn. and an alpine Pizzi grouping with two Bns) for the obstruction of Zagorias valley;

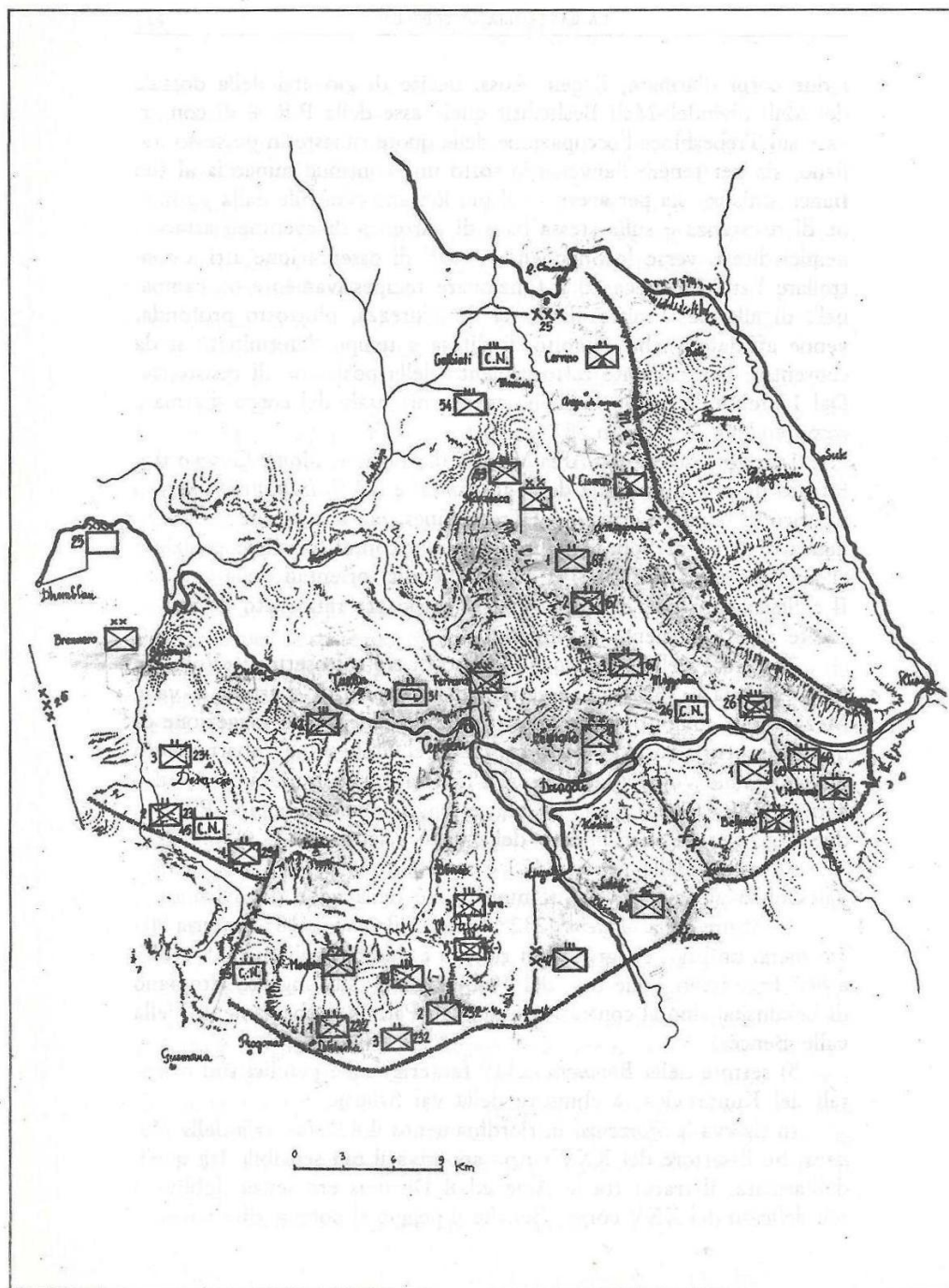
3) field of *Ferrara* (47th and 48th infantry and 146th btg. cc.nn.) from the Golico to the Bus Devrit, to interdiction of the Dhrinos valley;

4) field of *Modena* (232nd *Brennero* infantry, 18th infantry *Acqui* less a Bn., 3rd grenadiers reduced to two battalions, 35th and 82nd and 86th Bns. cc.nn., two btg. of the 5th bersaglieres) on the narrow plateau of Lekdushaj until to the buttress of Mali Palcies, to obstruction of the Bençes valley;

5) field of *Brennero* (231st infantry) on the southeastern slopes of the Kundreviça, to closing of the Salarije valley.

In reserve the *Sforzesca*; in reorganization the 42nd Infantry of the *Modena*. If the field of the XXV Corps appeared the more sensitive between those of the army, the feature between the Arze and the Dhrinos were without the most delicate doubt of the XXV Corps. Although worse could be said in the past,

LO SCHIERAMENTO DEL XXV CORPO IL 10 FEBBRAIO



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the front was very far away from having reached a concrete degree of safety. On the crest of the Trebeshines the few alpine companies, lost weight from the rigor of the climate and the supported combats, were found far away from all, split up in a wide occupation to blocks and exposed dangerously to every initiative of the enemy. Assessed with recognitions that, because of hardly adverse the meteorological conditions, the Greeks had been collected on the eastern slopes of the chain limiting itself to hold in depth only posts of alarm and patrols, with a series of surprise attacks the alpine extended the occupation towards south until to the summit of Trebeshines (hill 1925). In such a way the dominion of the crest line was assured for a feature of beyond seven kilometers, to an altitude for good advanced part to the 1,500 meters. Without doubt it was a tactical improvement, but it introduced weak two points: the first one was given from the impossibility to securely hold those positions with a few hundreds of men, of was thinkable to obtain an alpine Bn. only in reinforces; according to from the still existing precariousness of the welding with the VIII Corps. In the dominion the Mezgoranit valley that on it the Greek positions of the Trebeshines exercised, of Mt. Groppa and of the Brezhanit it rendered the defense difficult. This, finally, in Zagorias valley was found in one of those situations - unfortunately of course that rare in the course of the war - than only can support the firmness and the courage of the troops, exposed as was to offenses from the front and the left flank (Brezhanit) and dominated from the high and struck on the rear from Mt. Groppa.

As it has been said at the beginning of February 11th Army Command to oriented towards a counter-offensive towards Klisura with the *Cagliari* and the *Sforzesca*, but in the days succeeded the recognitions soon supplied indications that they forced to stop the attention on the probability that the enemy, assured and strengthened the possession of the two pillars of the terminus of Trebeshines (hill 1308 to north and Mt. Groppa to the south), meant to exercise one effort in great style in order to smash in towards Tepeleni or Berat. They induced to such forecast, than it will be revealed soundness, various elements; unanimous declarations of prisoners who more asserted in action the organization of an offensive in the zone of the Arze and to south; movements of artilleries and important concentrations of troops in Deshnices valley, confirmed from the aerial recognition; intensified activity of patrols on the Trebeshines; methodical bombardment by artilleries, by aviation in the zones of Dragoti, Luzati, Lekeli and Tepeleni. In relation to this convincement, the *Sforzesca* moved arriving at shelter of the Shendeli, ready counterattacking in the more opportune direction

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

and that at the moment it was presumed it was that one of Arza di Mezzo ⁽⁸⁾.

The days between the 9 and 12 February were characterized from growing of the Greek activity and the Italian countermeasures. While was in order to have beginning the battle of Tepeleni, on the rest of the front the work of the combat patrols ⁽⁹⁾ continued with varied intensity. The weather had recovered to the beautiful, but carrying to a worsening of the winter rigor that increased the number of the cases of freezing.

The average comprehensive weekly for the total losses of the army corps, than from the end of December was gone around on the eight hundred men, abruptly it increased to more than one thousand two hundred of which the half for diseases and freezing and with regard to Gen. Rossi it showed the convenience of a comprehensive reinforcing weekly, in order to avoid that the units were worn away to such point to render their remittance in efficiency much complex. But in order to do this it was necessary a reserve of personnel, that it had been constituted (a march regiment per Army), is true, but could not support such burden of replacement. One state of things of the sort in determines features of the front weighed on the units painfully. The commander of the *Brennero* wrote:

"(...) the rifle companies the 231st of infantry have the medium force of 50 men on the organic one of 150. The diseases have hit in greater measure the officers. That turns out that has been taken place also near the 232nd infantry. Nearly absolute deficiency of captains.

This situation, if it allows to supply serving to the arms, practically cancels the support of company for the counterassault, absorbs the field reserves and renders the constitution of the problematic units is take courage with battalion.

The field reserves has reduced to a subordinate infantry-support weapons company and a rifle company of 50 men, because two rifle companies have been absorbed which support from the battalions online, with works and refueling functions also.

As far as the draft animals, whose death for exhaustion up to yesterday has reached 40 and yesterday the figure of 19, it is satisfied in part the deficiency with the employment of mountain trucks until to mid Saliari and with the movement in ahead of all food.

8) For giving unit of direction to the units he assigned to operate on the left of the army corps, also the "Galbiati" cc.nn. grouping and the alpine units were placed under the dependencies of the commander of the *Sforzesca*.

9) Gen. Papagos, in his report on the war, has pointed out to Italian attacks, naturally rejected by the Greeks, completed in that period from the IV and from VIII Corps but, from the end of the operation on Klisura to the beginning of the battle counter-offensive in Deshnices valley, no major unit of the 11th Army it has lead any action deserving of the name attack. One is always and exclusively dealt of immediate reactions attempts of the enemy or of aimed small tending to clear the situation or to get hold of some tactical point.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

If the situation were maintained calm and if the time improved, the forces put into effect them, with the spirit who the spirit, would be sufficient to hold the front, also reducing to little thing the turns of rest. But if the counter opposing forces increased of number and of bellicosity or it had to be participated to offensive action, the rifle companies would exhausted in short their consistency and the availability of draft animals would not allow the quick change of position of the batteries and an intense rhythm of supplying of ammunitions ⁽¹⁰⁾.

To the extreme right of the army, on the flank to sea, the special army corps made use of the natural calm come down for the sparsely of staff from both sides and the sourness of the climate. Moreover, both the combatants more were taken care than to arrange itself conveniently to defense that to undertake actions offensives. Perhaps of two Italian major unit in place, the special D. alp. and the *Cuneo*, this last one was in gets worse conditions for the existing anchor mixing of the units and the unhappy initial organization. The occupation of Messimerit and Q. Kumbelles at the end of January had allowed with the division a sturdy and such flank to adorn the threat of encircling to short beam towards the sea, whose performance already had been tried in vain from the enemy. In truth, Messimerit (hill 1696) covered basic importance that allowed to the dominion of the mule tracks of Vunoj, while inaccessible the land who give the massive one falls towards north excluded every surprise on the flank, rendering easier the connection with the extreme right elements of the lateral G.U.. Although taken in consideration, its occupation had previously not been realized, but the tactical omission wide was justified from the difficulty to maintain troops at such altitude. Painful confirmation of that had just in the first days (26-29 January) of the occupation. A frightful one torments subjected the men of the alpine Bn. of formation (yielded from the special D. alp.) and of the 24th cc.nn. Bn, sent to replace the alpine, to a terrible test. While the thermometer marked temperatures inferior to 15° below zero and most driven in snow it removed every visibility, it cancelled every trace of paths and it covered the emplacements of the arms, the icy and most violent wind even prevented to maintain tents extended from stretches on the holes dug in the snow: men and arms came literally raised from earth and fall in the void of the precipitous deposits. Although they had been sent at once protective clothing, special sleeping bags and gear, the froze to death 17 alpine and 25 camicie nere were the sad

10) DS Commander D. f. *Brennero*, f. 394/op. dated 7.2.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

budget of those four days. Painful the supplied came done with bearers and only on 22 February for the first time the mule could reach Messimerit ⁽¹¹⁾. However a period of operating stasis was begun that, but rare interruptions, had to last all the winter and for which the two contender were useful in order to improve the living conditions and to strengthen the held positions.

In the meantime the Armed forces high command held of eye the course of the general rearrangement of the troops, on whose expirations had based the operational plans. And also having established the date oriented with certain elasticity, if things did not go as previewed. On 25 February the operations section introduced to Gen. Cavallero an endured memorandum specifying that the program was already in delay regarding the previewed times because of the entity of the new major unit transports, that part of the steamboats available had demanded the employment of a great part of the frequently unfavorable conditions of the sea; of the quantitative and qualitative insufficiency of the steamboats it employed for the transports in Albania, factor this that the Higher Transportation Directorate had declared not susceptible of improvement. It achieved some that entire the block of major unit could be ready, in the case of the equipments, towards 15 March rather than for the end of February.

"But a greater delay and still more serious - the memorandum continued - will be come to verify for the necessary supplies for being able to begin, towards 15 March, a offensive operation.

The problem of the constitution of the supplies is based on three terms: two variable and one fixed.

Variable terms:

- every day consumptions: they are in continuous increase, because the daily increases the force present in Albania;

- potentiality of the ports: it is also this in sensitive increase, that it little compensates but the increases of the consumptions. Moreover, the ability to absorption of the ports cannot more be limitless, much that it is tied to some immutable factors (conditions of the sea and lack of ship available) that they do not concur to increase the rendering beyond a sure limit.

Fixed term of the problem: entities of the supplies in order to begin the offensive operation (...).

Based on the averages of the first fortnight of February, the drainages of the materials in the ports of Albania are go around today on 2,900 tons, excluded the tonnage for the civilians, but comprised all the material of the engineers for construction. the

11) In twenty-nine days bearers made 5,100 round trips with average of beyond 170 trips per day. Every bearer had a cargo of 10 kg and completed the distance from the point of arrival of the baggage train to the Messimerit, little more than a kilometer online of air with approximately 1,000 meters of unevenness, in seven hours.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Such average will be able to perhaps increase a little, but it does not convene, in order to remain in the limits of the *real possibilities*, to count on a advanced medium figure to the 3,000 tons every day. But it is necessary, in order to take advantage of to the maximum the tonnage unloaded to the ends of the supplies, to interrupt the arrivals of the material of the engineers.

With average of 3,000 tons every day, they could as maximum be collected in Albania, for 15 March, 90,000 tons of materials.

The every day consumptions are gone around on the 2,700 tons, that brings to a total, for the date already indicated of 15 March, of approximately 80,000 tons (admitting that it does not continue to increase with the rhythm puts into effect them the present force in Albania, in the which case would increase in proportion the total tonnage of consumption).

The residual maximum margin for the supplies of 10,000 tons therefore remain.

And since for an infantry division the weight of a day of provisions and materials several (comprised fuel share) is of approximately 150 tons and that one of a unfoc of 300 tons, the 10,000 tons of margin correspond to:

-20 days approximately of supplies and 20 unfoc for one division, or to - 4 days of supplies and 4 unfoc for 5 divisions.

The maximum data is this to keep in mind in the forecasts for one future offensive action ".

But for the moment Gen. Cavallero had to think next to Tepeleni on which an impetuous Greek attack was being pulled down.

2. THE FIGHT FOR TEPELENI.

The counter-offensive on Klisura made to comprise the Greek High command who, given to the alignment and the new force ratio of the western field, the action in depth on Berat could not be continued under the serious threat exercised from the XXV Corps against the operating troops between the Osum and the chain of the Trebeshines. A new Italian operation lead with more important forces, employees to block, with greater support of artillery and an effective participation of aviation could have made to quickly lose to the Greeks all the territorial gain until to that moment acquired and perhaps compromising irreparability the II Corps, that it comprised the greater part and more choice of the Greek units. One became therefore necessary to suspend the offensive between the Osum and Vojussa in order first of all to eliminate the advanced wedge constituted by the Italian XXV Corps, operation that would have concurred with the Greeks at the same time to try the conquest of Tepeleni for encircling. An attack in fact on the Trebeshines

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

and along the Arzè it could seize the Shendeli and to open the road of Luftinja valley, that it ends up in Vojussa to north of Tepeleni, therefore behind its defense. This operation was decided from the Greek Command to the end of January with the goal "*to clear the situation and to increase the zone of safety of the crossroads of Klisura*", materializing objective with the occupation of the massive of the Shendeli and the regions of Mezgorani and Pesclani, respective to north and south of the Vojussa; he was dealing with, in synthesis, to attack Tepeleni from the pillar of the Golico, that of it was the facing the bastion origins from the Zagorias valley and from Dhrinos valley, and from the Shendeli-Arze zone, therefore to penetrate at the same time along the furrows of the Vojussa and the Luftinja (sketch n. 88).

But for Gen. Papagos was something of other: the more and more probable opening of the hostilities on the Bulgarian theatre. In such eventually it was not possible of to control from Gianina all the operations of, less still, to direct directly the two army corps engaged against Valona. Of it the articulation of command derived the opportunity of a review of all at a high level and the first fortnight of February saw therefore the performance of the following ordering:

Army Section of the eastern Macedonian (Gen. Bakopoulos), composed from the V Corps and various supports;

Army Section of the western Macedonian (Gen. Pitsikas), constituted from the III and IV army corps;

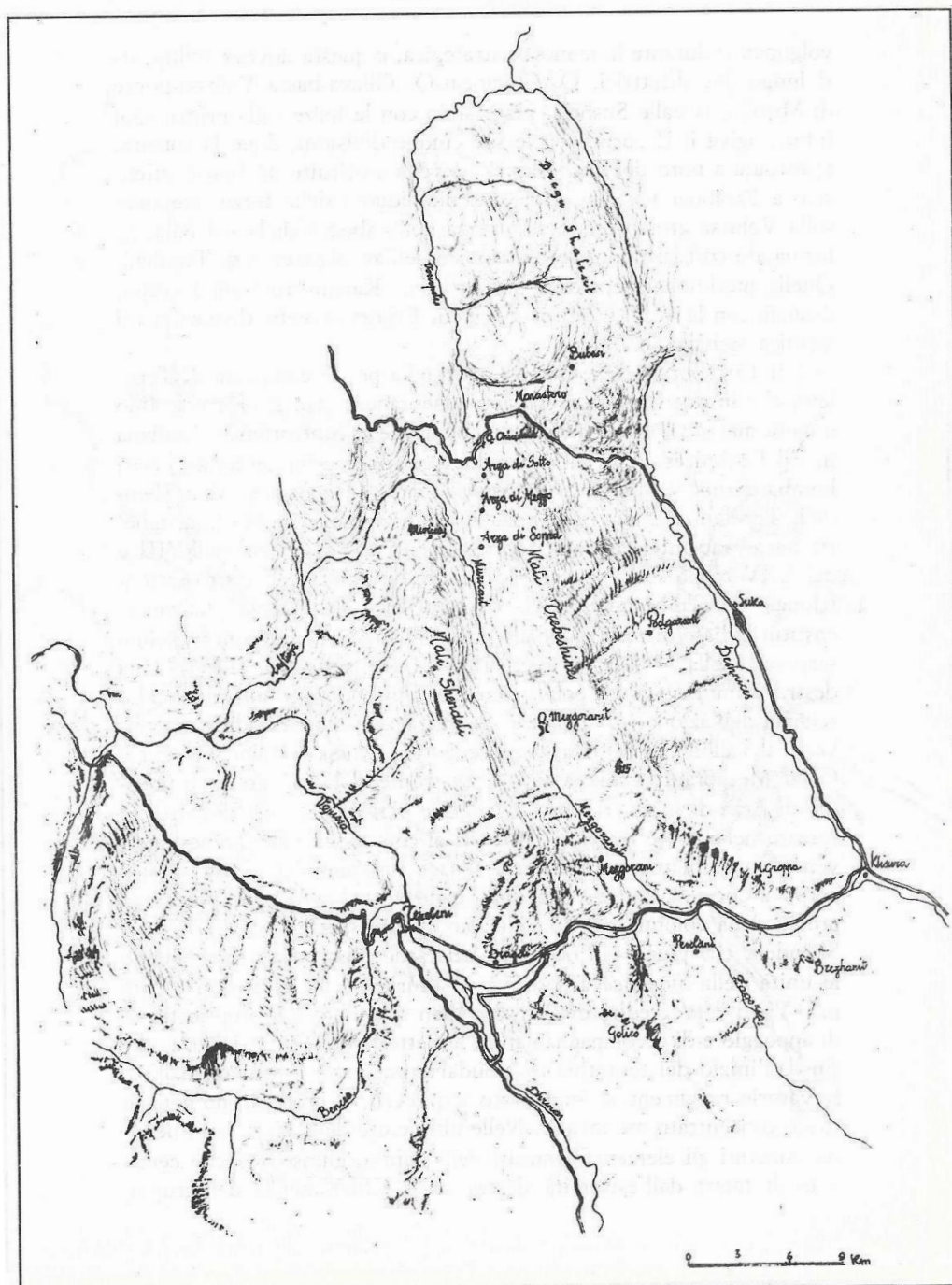
Army Section of the Epirus (Gen. Drakos): I and II C.A. and division of cavalry;

Army Section of Thrace (Gen. Kotoulas): 12th Inf. Div. and various supports.

In the strategic plan Tepeleni was simply a moment of maneuver for the objective attainment of which by now all was concentrated the attention of the Greek High command: Valona.

The task to exercise a resolute effort in order to conquer was entrusted to the Army Section with the Epirus that arranged in total of ten divisions, nearly all re-united in the two army corps: I Corps with 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 8th Inf. Div.; the II with 1st, 5th, 11th, 15th and 17th Inf. Div. An attempt to occupy the Shendeli with the 5th Inf. Div., programmed for 3 February, was delayed is for poor meteorological conditions is because the premature employment of the 5th Inf. Div. would have left the II Corps without reserves. Consequently it had been ordered to the 17th Inf. Div. to move itself on foot from the Korçano - where it would be flowed from Florina the 6th Inf. Div: - to the zone of Premeti. Tepeleni would have fallen for turning

SCHEMA ORO-IDROGRAFICO DELLA ZONA PRINCIPALE DELLA
BATTAGLIA DI TEPELENI



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

during the strategic maneuver, and this had to be developed along two guidelines: Q. Chiciocut - Q. Gllava -lower Vojussa - bridge of Mifolj and Sushica valley, gravitating with the on first forces. Here in fact the II Corps with its five divisions acted; after the breach, carried out to north of the Trebeshines, it had to constitute a defensive flank to Paraboar towards north and, with a share of the forces, to come down on the large Vojussa road to the height of the outlet of the Salarije valley, being formed therefore the northern branch of the winding of Tepeleni. The southern was given from the 8th (Gen. Katsimitros) of the I Corps, which with the 3rd Inf. Div. reinforced (Gen. Bakos) would have come down the Sushica valley (sketch n. 89).

On 13 February had beginning the battle for the conquest of Tepeleni, than in two parts, separated from momentary stasis, protracted until mid March getting confused with the beginning of the Italian counter-offensive in the Deshnices Valley. At 07:45, for two hours consecutive, enemy aircraft bombed in successive big waves the Mezgoranit valley, Mali Shendeli, Tepeleni and the plain of Luzati. At the same time the artilleries struck intensely the entrenchments and the positions of the VIII and the XXV Corps on all the interested arc of the front. The northern feature of the Trebeshines, from hill 1308 to hill 1925, the summit, constituted the line of departure from which the battalions in first group of the Greek 5th Inf. Div. moved, III and II/43rd on the left and II and the I/44th to the right, overwhelmed the few remaining alpine elements on the crest. The outline of the action was simple. It was dealt to move straight through the valley of Muriçaj in order to occupy the ridge of the Shendeli and Chiaf Mezgoranit (sketch n. 90). The front to the Greek II/43rd, the garrison of Arza of over, reduced to approximately two platoons in order having due to reinforce in the night the units assigned to the counterassault on the Trebeshines, was overwhelmed in spite of the tenacious resistance lead until man to man. While soon after Arza di Mezzo fell also, the bulk of the column of the Greek 43rd headed towards hill 1178 of the Shendeli, that it reached to occupy in the late afternoon, preventing the units of the *Sforzesca* hurrying from Muriçaj and Martolosi di Sopra. Seen progressing of the attack, well supported from just the fire of support and accompaniment, the batteries of the 17th artillery, than since from the beginning of the breakthrough attempt were informed from the implanted regimental observatory to hill 1178, lavished with a concentrated but in vain fire. In the last hours of the day the enemy, exceeds the advanced elements of the defense, reached a few hundreds of meters from the right extremity of the alignment of the groups;

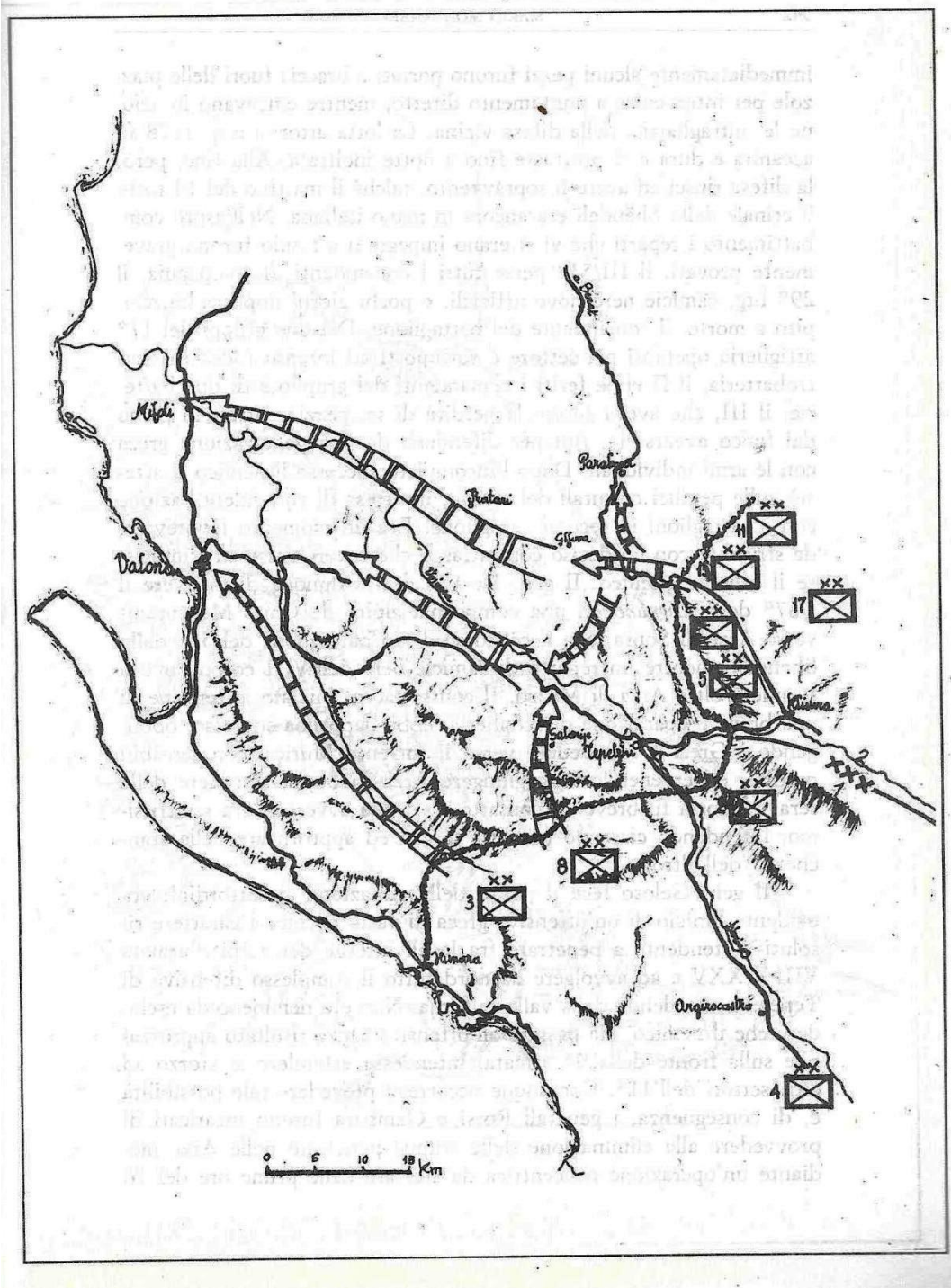
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 541

The Greek operating design for the conquest of Valona

Schizzo n. 89

IL DISEGNO OPERATIVO GRECO PER LA CONQUISTA DI VALONA



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

immediately some pieces were carried by hand outside of the pits in order taking part to directed tracking, while the machine-guns of the near defense entered in action. The fight around hill 1178 was heated and hard and lasted until late into the night. But in the end, the defense succeeded to having the upper hand, such that the morning of the 14th all the crest of the Shendeli was still in Italian hand. In the bitter combat the units that were engaged in depth were seriously tired: the III/53rd lost all the company commanders; the 29th cc.nn Bn. nine officials, and a few days after will fall, hit mortally, the commander of the battalion. Of the two groups of the 17th artillery operating in the field and subordinates to intense fire of counter-battery, the II had hurt the commanders of the group and two batteries; the III, that it had endured the loss of six guns hit in full load from the opposing fire, ended in order to defend themselves from a Greek penetration with individual arms. After the incomplete success the enemy was attested on the eastern slopes of the relief, in wait to resume, the action with the battalions in second group. It was a favorable moment, to take advantage of with a determined counterattack that was surpassing and eliminated the Greek salient. Gen. De Cia determined therefore to move the I/67th of alpine the *Legnano* and one company from Chiaf Mezgoranit towards Arza di Sopra, with the aid of a battalion of the 53rd from the Shendeli, while an CC.NN unit of the VIII Corps had to come down beyond Arza di Mezzo. The counterattack, begun after of a short preparation of artillery, had at first happened, obligating the Greeks to retreat towards Muriçaj torrent with sensitive losses, and reaching to catch up Arza di Sopra to the falling of the evening. The pause was short. The contact between the two adversaries was tight, meaning everyone not to give truce and to be useful for the fatigue of the other.

Gen. Geloso made the point of the situation the subordinate: the beginning of a Greek offensive of immense capacity to resolute, tending character was obvious to penetrate between the inner wings of the VIII and XXV army corps and to turn the defensive from the north all the whole of Tepeleni, coming down from Luftinja valley. It was not do not give to exclude that the enemy, already passed to the offensive without appreciable result on the front of the 9th Army, meant to extend the effort to other fields of the 11th. However it was necessary to preview such possibility and, consequently, Generals Rossi and Gambara were in charge to supply to the elimination of the troops penetrated in the Arze by means of a joint operation to deliver in the first hours of the 16th

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 543

The attack with the Greek 5th Inf. Div. to the Shendeli (13 February)

Schizzo n. 90

L'ATTACCO DELLA 5^a D.f. GRECA ALLO SHËNDELI (10 FEBBRAIO)

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

from Chiaf Mezgoranit towards the north and the Shendeli towards the east from part of the XXV Corps and with a pair of battalions from Arza di Mezzo towards south from part of the VIII. To the preparation, of the duration of thirty minutes, the mass of the artilleries of the VIII Corps had to participate. Naturally this did not exclude the local initiatives for which it was essential the immediacy and the timeliness. It concluded Geloso: *"Memo to all the Commanders of G. U. in address that for every eventuality will have to count exclusively on the forces and on the widely sufficient means of which they decide and that consider to the operating requirements of the moment and the respective field"*.

Also Cavallero was calm, for convinced how much that the reaction in course of the *Legnano* could, yes, to lighten the pressure but not to resolve the situation, and for how much displeased one not to still succeed in avoid to the Greek operating subjection:

"I meant to act offensively - commented - and my plan was that one to attack as soon as possible from south and north. The units arrive but unprepared and whichever plan of operations is impossible. We must by now consider that beyond to the necessary time for the affluence it is necessary that one for the preparation, for giving them structure. Days from the arrival for being able are necessary 15-20 to acquire this preparation. Therefore every turns the favorable time for the employment always has been exceeded of two weeks, I make a plan but I cannot ever apply it "⁽¹²⁾.

Went to Fieri, also he had asked Geloso if it already thought that the *Julia* could usefully be employed, to time debit, against Klisura, repeating tried how much from the *Legnano*. It was for the moment a simple guideline, but he re-entered in the range of the possibilities to study. The agreement to seem favorable to Generals Geloso and Rossi while induced it to order that the division was placed in the conditions of being able itself to move for the 20th, perceiving, with the directives n. 15, than would not have given reinforce at least before a ten of days, that is until when major unit in I reorder had not been available, and that the *Puglie* Inf. Div. (Gen. D'Aponte), whose first elements were disembarking, would be collection at Sinanaj remaining of course in reserve of the Comando Superiore⁽¹³⁾.

The 15th the attempt of 53rd infantry to improve the local situation hit in full load against an analogous Greek movement. The action was most violent, it was increased soon to all the front of attack and came

12) Cavallero diary, date 14.2.1941.

13) DSCSFAA, f. 02080/op. dated 15.2.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

quickly fed from both sides. After an bloody fight lasting all the day, with alternate vicissitudes that cost to us more than 700 between died and hurt and that they carried the enemy to still resume, to again lose and to retake hill 1178, objective of its tenacious efforts, at dark found the 53rd Inf. holding to the western positions of Mali Shendeli, that by now from hill 1178 to Punta Nord was in Greek hand. Laboriously, but valid contained on the front, the opposing penetration was expanded with strong and violent lateral aiming. All the zone comprised between Muriçaj and Chiaf Mezgoranit was theatre of uninterrupted combats in a fight that had hired episodic character. The 16th the defense threw into the fray the 54^o infantry *Sforzesca*, good part of the 67th infantry *Legnano*, the rests of the mountain battalions and the CC.NN; the attack, the rest of the 5th division. Put foot on the Shendeli, for the Greeks it was sufficient to increase the collapse and to make sure the possession of the lines of departure for the prosecution in depth towards Tepeleni. But the dream vanished without stopping in the hard truth of the action, from hill to hill, position to position. The attack to Punta Nord, delivered with the favor of the fog, at first seemed to have favorable outcome, but the fire of arrest of the automatic arms, the obstruction of artillery and the continuous counterassault rejected it. It renewed, before other climb, the attempts, sought after the next day and night, at dawn the 17th of the Greek penetration had exhausted its push and its control on the ridge of Shendeli was limited to hill 1178 and all at once of approximately a kilometer to south of it. Towards 09:00 of the 16th, but a message of Geloso had arrived at the Comando Superiore: "*The enemy has attacked in forces entire front Val Dhrinos*".

It has been already said that all the arc from the Trebeshines to the Golico constituted the more delicate feature of the field entrusted to the XXV Corps. In fact, while the Greek 5th Inf. Div. tried to smash in to north of Klisura, the 2nd Inf. Div. entered in its turn in the active of the fight for giving its contribution, that it hoped decisive. For it to reach the valley of Mezgorani meant to reduce to Shendeli the eastern defense of Tepeleni, on the right of the Vojussa, and to feed the operations against such barrier avoiding the difficulty to cross the Trebeshines; to conquer the Golico concurred the opening of a gash of enormous value and the crisis nearly all the alignment of the artilleries of the XXV Corps.

The first attack was delivered to the dawn of the 15th (sketch n. 91): the Greek 34th infantry (and III/34th, II/3rd and I/36th) in the Zagorias valley against the "Pizzi" group; the 39th organic astride of the ridge of the Golico against

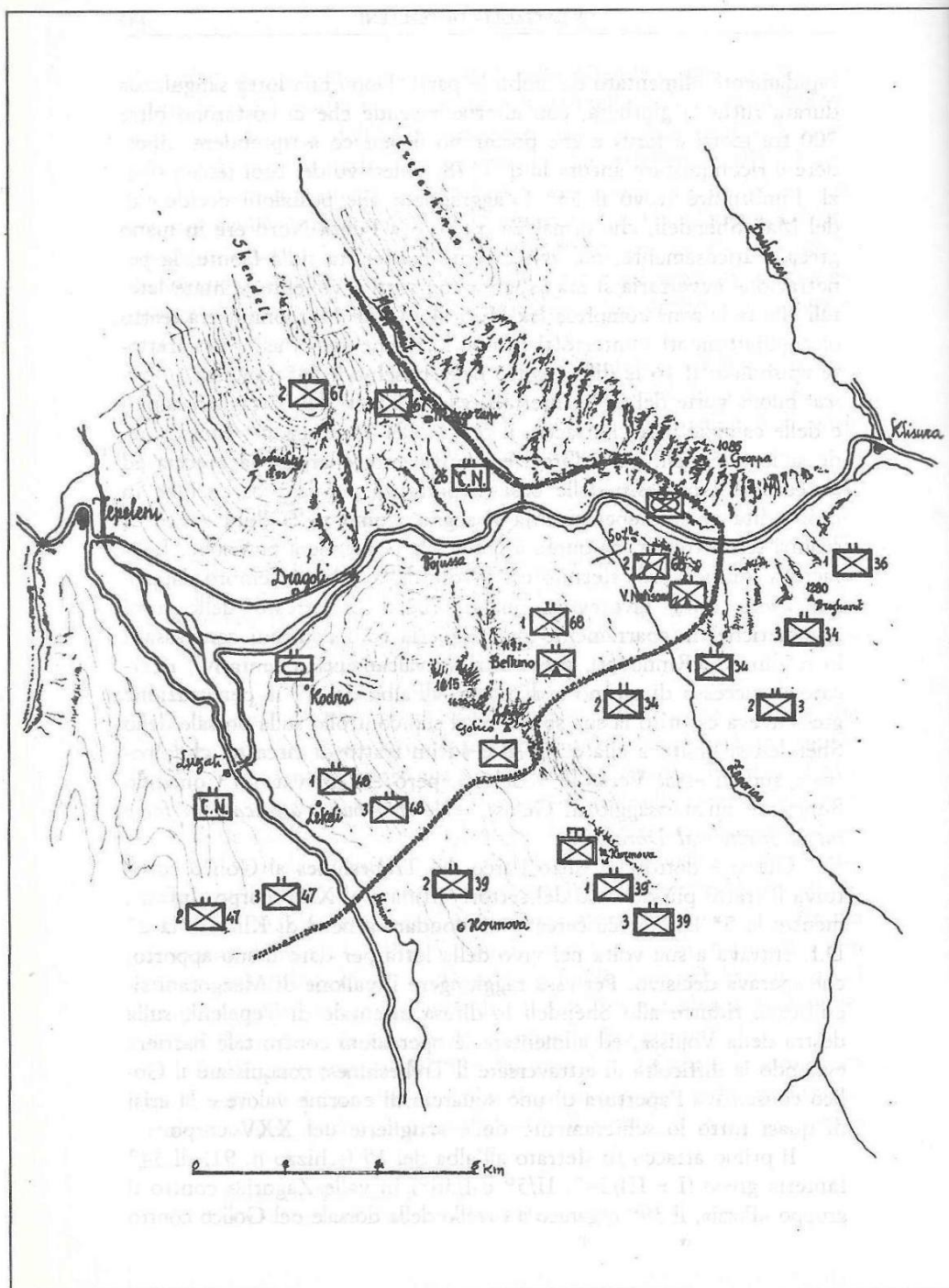
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 546

The attack with the Greek 2nd Inf. Div. in Zagorias valley and on Golico (15 February)

Schizzo n. 91

L'ATTACCO DELLA 2^a D.f. GRECA IN VAL ZAGORIAS E SUL M. GOLICO (15-20 FEBBRAIO)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

part of the 48th infantry *Ferrara*. The action departing from Brezhanit clearly had the large advantage of the dominion of the heights that gives north and from east enjoy on the narrow crest of Pesclani. In three hours of combat the center of the II/68th Inf. *Legnano* came smashed in; the early afternoon the *Val Natisone* Bn was forced to abandon the full of rocks slopes of the Brezhanit, to which from many weeks had held; towards evening infiltrations to astride of the water course obligated the *Belluno* and the I/68th to a partial regression. All the outlet of the valley as taken from the chest and flank. The 16 morning, under a concentric fire of artillery and mortars, the position of resistance established on the crest the northeast of the Golico continued to hold secure, but on the right of the torrent the defenders were by now to shelter of the Vojussa, almost impotent regarding the enemy who surpassed them from along the spur that they give the summit of the Brezhanit reaches hill 507, the remaining obstructions of the valley bottom.

The stage had been increased. On all the rest of the forehead, until to the sea, the army of the Epirus attacked localizing the efforts in the zone of Mt. Scutarà (3rd D.f.), on the plateau of the Kurvelesh against Lekdushaj (8th D.f.), in Dhrinos valley and on the chain of the Golico (2nd D.f.). To the West the fire reaction of the *Cuneo* and the *Modena* was such to demolish every desire, even if, to say the true one, it is doubt that the Greek I Corps truly thought to succeed to open a passage towards Valona or the valley of the Vojussa in those features. Instead, the director of the Dhrinos gave more to think.

Cavallero received the first news, asked clarification to Gen. Rossi, which he explained that to the extreme left the situation deserved the much attention but did not appear worrisome; that the connection with the VIII Corps still resisted; that for the moment the greater pressure had place to the outlet of the Zagorias valley; that, finally, to part the Golico whose investment from south could be forerunner of developments denied (the garrison of Mali Hormova was withdrawn), there was anything by now fear from the remaining fields for theirs satisfactory solidity and efficiency. Cavallero however could not less make than to consider how much thin it was, to made accounts, the diaphragm that it divided the Greeks from Tepeleni: "*Task that prevails the necessity to preview worse!*" it commented 14th and it was wanted to be secure. Since the *Julia* turned out to place, with the expectation made for the baggage train, was oriented to move it to shelter of the XXV Corps. For the *Puglie* it joined to the proposal of Geloso,

14) Cavallero diary, date 16.2.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

to concentrate it in the average Val Luftinja, to the height of Chiaf Chiciocut, from where he became easier and express the participation in order to adorn promptly to whichever enemy progress on the Shendeli and in the Arze, in order to counterattack on the enemy right flank in case was successful to proceed in direction of the Val Luftinja and in order to eventually support the defense in the field of the VIII army corps in correspondence with the director of Chiaf Chiciocut. While he put Mussolini to the current of the events:

"Before returning to the tactical place I want to give the feeling to You of the events on Tepeleni. The battle for Tepeleni has delineated the afternoon of the 13th, it has developed to the 14th and the 15th with attempt of encircling of Tepeleni from the north. The enemy believed to find a void and has been surprised from our occupation in forces. He has not been able to smash in from the north and then he has tried towards the south trying to go up on the Shendeli (...).

The enemy has had the most serious losses for the shooting of the artilleries of the VIII C.A. and the *Sforzesca*, but he continues to feeding the effort. Yesterday it has taken Chiaf Mezgoranit, but in any case is still fighting, and on the front of the Shendeli the actions are in course.

On the front of Zagorias yesterday and today the actions have been violent and stretch to extend on the front of the *Ferrara* and are obvious that they are being increased more and more. And presumable a general offensive. Also at Valona movements of forces in the local area are noticed and approaches not still specified of artilleries and troops. The attack is carried out from the Cretan division⁽¹⁵⁾ and from some element of minor account and it can be considered that the enemy is engaging those five or six divisions that he had in reorganization. We are of front to a great offensive.

Our situation. I will resort to circumlocutions because the telephone is not secret (...) be examinee the provisions and someone is already in action It is one delicate situation of war. You will say: since you have left to produce this state of things? I try to prevent this your question saying to you that we are resolutions with difficulty blocking at Berat, where something can still happen. While I made the wall to Berat is watched by me also from this part because I previewed the encircling attempt. Of Metaxas rest before dying he had expressed this intention. We are to the fourth day and the encircling has not come. If you had more forces I would have taken the initiative, but I did not have any. The units in I reorder have had complements not instructed. The *Puglie* is at a distance; all elements that cannot be been involved in premature actions.

I think, Duce, that as the other times also this situation will come faced. The encircling already is prevented. I mean that the people that are in the line, are pure losing something, are clear concurring some bag, gives the time to me to employ the reserves without to make a general disordering. I have the head and the nerves to place. I think that this is the end. This is the general offensive,

15) The 5th division of infantry.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

that he pre-announced for the end of February. Up to now they have been sector efforts (Berat), now is the general time. The important is to contain in order to arrive to the employment of the reserves (...).

Task that tomorrow the south front of Tepeleni will be all investing. I study the worse hypothesis.

The withdraw to which I have pointed out has happened in order and approximately the losses I can say to you that the 7,000 announce by the Greek bulletin are from excluding (...) and a hard situation, but we face it well.

I will telephone you at the twenty, because I preview that until that hour I will not have been able to collect news"⁽¹⁶⁾.

The Greek attack on the right of the Dhrinos was concentrated on the place of the rock of Mali Hormova. A platoon of the 48th infantry, one of the *Bolzano* and one of the *Belluno*) and against of it maneuver the 39th was held by about eighty men (Greek infantry, with two battalions in column (the third was on the left, at Hormova). The fight was clearly learns and after two hours of upset resistance the small garrison was forced to retreat towards the Golico, where the defense became stiff thanks to a hurriedly the company of 48th infantry sent. The threat along the ridge was outlined serious, however the constant pressure of the enemy, the intense fire of its artillery on the positions still estates, on their backs, the muleteer of access, the bridges and the valley bottoms, all turned out in vain. But the losses were strong and the units became scarce to hurry reinforcements that the Commander of the army corps had already asked and that the Comando Superiore, after some uncertainty, had finally granted. It was be a matter of the *Julia*, in reordering at Mavrova, close to Valona, where were preparing the motor vehicles for its transfer in zone.

In the night on the 17th along the roadway of Argirocastro was an uninterrupted movement of motor vehicles: the enemy was carrying online unit in second formation. The following morning the Greeks resumed tenacious their efforts; they still raged themselves with rabid violence for some day, literally immolated entire units in the attempt to smash in. Managed again to achieve some result that will make them to more and hope more, but were three distinguished attacks, in direction of the Shendeli, di Pesclani and of the Golico. The first one grew fainter with bloody losses from both sides on the heavy counterassault delivered from the II/53rd Inf. and the *Bolzano*; fed through the Trebeshines, it increased of intensity in the afternoon thanks to a most violent fire of artillery and mortars, but it did not land to results realized

¹⁶⁾ Cavallero diary, date 16.2.1941, hours 10,30.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

and it had to be arrested leaving stacks of dead on the contended hills. Also the competition offered from other elements of the Greek 5th Inf. Div., that from hill 1620 of the Trebeshines they had tried to come down on Mezgorani, vanished because arrested from the fire of the strong point. Of the similar action in Val Zagorias did not succeed to proceed. The attempt of infiltration, the investment of the eastern flank with often following of bitter actions man to man, the temporary occupation of hill 1192, on the crest that from the Golico it comes down towards the northeast on Pesclani, the not give some fruit: hill 1192 came resumption from Nth a reaction of the I/68th Inf. and of the *Belluno*. On the Golico the counterattack that the *Ferrara* had launch against Mali Hormova came instead preceded a most violent effort of the Greek 39th infantry. The garrison of the 48th infantry - a lean courageous company - soon was encircled, but a furious bayonet charge of that fist of men reached, in spite of the disproportionate fight, to breakout of the circle that was in order to close itself and drive behind the enemy. To noon the II/48th Inf. came started on the Golico to reinforce of the defenders. In the meantime the Commander of the XXV Corps was taken part. Since the morning he had communicated to the army the losses assessed in the last days. The *Sforzesca* field had marked 91 officials and 2,074 men of troop, between dead men, hurt and missing. In particular, the 53rd infantry had lost all the senior officials including the battalion adjutant. The *Legnano* field, 43 officials and 1,696 men of troop. Between the officials the commanders of the two regiments of infantry.

Holding also account of the remarkable amount of arms destroyed from enemy fire or lost with the men, Gen. Rossi asked the allocation at least two mountain battalions to employ on the Shendeli and the other on the Golico. For the moment it put to disposition of the *Ferrara* the II/3rd grenadiers in order to support the Golico and to render the welding with the *Legnano* on the crest of hill 1192 surer. Gen. Geloso Comprised that the circumstances could weigh psychologically and reiterated the order to hold the line with a personal letter to the gen. Rossi:

"While I confirm to You my previous precise directives and orders circa the absolute necessity of a defense to the end on all the front of your army corps for the maintenance with Tepeleni until to the last man even if completely surrounded, I repeat to You that you must guarantee the balance to me possession of the positions of the Scindeli, from the Vojussa to the welding with the VIII C.A., defense in place supported and enlivened from immediate actions of counterassault and counterattack.

The action of your army corps, especially on its left, is in this

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

moment of understood importance to the effects of the further operational developments on all the front of the army.

He is absolutely indispensable to hold, and to hold in sight of the imminent offensive resumption. However it is necessary to earn time, at all costs, contrasting hand to hand the land and taking root themselves to the positions momentarily occupied from the enemy in order to resume them as soon as possible.

You hold very present, Excellence, than no other rear position to the Scindeli allows to cover on the right Vojussa, in effective way, the defense of Tepeleni and to realize a strongly welding with the VIII C.A.

On Account of Your personal work as commander and as a soldier"⁽¹⁷⁾.

The Comando Superiore Albania followed also it with sum attention the development of the battle, but with total optimism. An entire regiment of the *Puglie* was found already to back of the VIII Corps and the *Julia* was nearly ready to move. On the other hand it was prudent not to run risks, therefore it allowed that the 41st infantry of the *Modena*, still in reorder, passed to disposition of the 11^a Army for the urgent requirements with the XXV Corps. The *Julia* constituted the paper winning in the thought of Cavallero: it meant, as appeared possible, to cut off the Greek penetration on the Shendeli claim of necessary preliminary matter for a immense offensive resumption. To such task the *Julia* was destined. According to the directives n. 16⁽¹⁸⁾ the operating concept was based on a main action in direction of Arza di Sopra with the *Julia* and a subsidiary along the crest of the Shendeli possibly with the troops in situated. Being the goal very delimited of the operation, it was desirable that it could resolve itself without participation of other forces, so as to not to affect the availabilities for the future, but the VIII Corps had to be put in conditions for taking part to the occurrence is in order to support the *Julia* is, in case very favorable, in order to complete success along the chain of the Trebeshines. That evening Cavallero telephoned to Mussolini:

"The fifth day of battle the concluded with situation is unchanged. Fighting very hard. Many enemy losses and ours sensitive, especially in officials. But also many of troop. The soldiers strike themselves very well, very well. They are fierce to say it to you (...). I can say of calm being (...). Creed that the action will last until to the end of the month because the continuous battle but the encircling already is stopped. Creed that the action will extend Today interesting also the field of Valona (...). aviation has worked with some difficulty because of the conditions of the weather. On the Shendeli the hill 1178 have been lost, retaken, lost and retaken: now we are to twenty meters from it. We hold (...). The situation well

17) DS Commando 11th army, f. 023972/op. dated 17.2.1941.

18) DSCSFAA, f. 02221/op. dated 17.2.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

it is this. To hold in order to arrive at the moment in which I will have much to spend.
This is my task"⁽¹⁹⁾.

Between the several problems of the XXV Corps there was also the issue of the passages on the water course, many times interrupted the aerial and land attacks. To these the unexpected floods of the Vojussa joined that repeatedly removed the bridges of boats ranges in the zone of Tepeleni, putting in crisis the supply for all the troops engaged on the right of the river, since the availability of boats therefore were limited not to concur the existence of a reserve. The 18th, exactly, an other flood swept up the bridge of Tepeleni, which with the its material smashing successive bridge to the confluence of the Bençes renewing the logistic difficulties while the battle infuriated especially on the northern Shendeli. All the crest was scattered of died that they testified the bitterness of the actions. Assault and the counterassault they followed without rests, but the defenders succeeded to conserve the positions demolishing, one after the other, all the enemy attempts to end up from North Point and Chiaf Mezgoranit. Of the upset par the fight in the Zagorias valley, between hill 1192 and Pesclani. Also every effort was rejected here, but the resistance was put to hardest test, a lot that in the afternoon Gel. Geloso asked the *Val Tagliamento* and *Val Felta* Bns. - that they had been added to the *Julia* - to re-unite to the " Pizzi " group. Cavallero opposed an means refusal:

"I have received yours fono 024041 - he telephoned at once - and want makes you to consider the situation of the *Julia*. To touch it today would be a crime. Rossi this morning have asked a company, now the demand increases and becomes of two battalions.

The approach of the 8th alpine is prudential measure adopted but with granite purpose not to employ it. I only approach in order to earn a little space and - the *Julia* invoke that it is not made even this movement. I have left the 41st at you disposition and I make present you that the neglect of the army in reordering makes that is not efficient as necessary. You have recognized same.

I put aware to the most serious responsibility of unraveling an unit that is precious to me. I have already said that with the complements it arrives would have been improved also the valley battalions. Therefore the *Julia* has now seven Bns.

Represent our more precious heel. We want just unraveling? I have made an written order for the reordering of the units and also I have said, in the order, that it is to my disposition. Now not give orders of categorical denial. Of the two valley battalions already has spoken other time. He has asked Rossi, you have asked the same. And an idea that is emerged other times:

19) Diary Cavallero, date 17.2.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

I have said the concept. It rethinks to us and then he telephones. Better to unravel the *Val Chiese* (I have touched this argument for how much not of my competence) that the *Julia*. And a what sacred. If we are not taken from the water to the throat it helps to respect it me. If I can wait for two weeks to engage it is the ideal. I ask your collaboration in order to save the *Julia*. He thinks and you report to us to me ^{"(20)}.

For Cavallero he was absolutely indispensable not to throw down the employment of the *Julia*. On the Golico there was the II/48th of the *Ferrara* and, in second group, the II/3rd grenadiers and were behaved dearly. On the Shendeli much breathlessness could be resisted without using a battalion of formation of the 41st infantry (all that that the regiment could give) and a cc.nn. Bns of the *Legnano*. To Pesclani instead it was necessary to intervene. The the *Val Chiese* Bn. was at Berat reordering, but it could not be still considered employable in combat. Have had misadventure: left in disorder, employed badly, its rendering had not been which it was desired. At the moment it had 800 men with a few officials. Could the XXVI Corps, if it were not pressed, take it and replace it to place with one sure calm yielding in exchange the *Susa* or the *Intra*? The 9th Army it concurred and it promised that the next morning the *Susa* would have left for the Zagorias. The evening report to Mussolini was decidedly optimistic:

"The sixth day is a last good. The opposing action has been strong in Dhrino valley and against the *Ferrara*, to the extreme left of the south front of the XXV Corps. Action less strong in the Shendeli field. Our troops have held well. We prepare ourselves in order to react, but be able to because of the delay... The issue of the money box (...). Been sure that we face well. The spirit of the Commanders is high, that one of the troops is magnificent, in spite of the many losses, because between the *Sforzesca* and other troops in the field Shendeli- south front there are more than 4,000 losses. In spite of this the troops go magnificently well; they are sure much advanced because they react well. Ours artillery harvests: it has a magnificent alignment that takes to front and rear. Therefore well, much good (...)"⁽²¹⁾.

Then the 19th the *Susa*, reached in the Tomorreces valley bottom, found the footbridge interrupted and had to be started for Q. Dardhes on Berat. It was be a matter of a delay of twenty-four hours and Cavallero then decided to put the led battalion of the 8th alpine to disposition of the XXV Corps, in temporary substitution of the *Susa*, *but* with the tie not to send the battalion online if not in tight case

20) Diary Cavallero, date 1802.1941.

21). Diary Cavallero, date 18.2.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

necessity. In so far as, after to have given the order to the Army Commander, he telephoned also to the Gen. Rossi specifying: "*I recommend the Golico-Pesclani-Mezgorani line. They are convinced that the enemy, being failed the encircling, will make a deprived of hope effort on the Golico and to Pesclani to cut off that salient (...)*".

In spite of the climatic conditions went continuously getting worse and both the contenders were exhausted from the incessant fight, still until the 20th combats prolonged with unchanged intensity, especially on the Golico - become the new theatre of dispute for Tepeleni, the dramatic theatre for the duel that was carried out between the cliffs to peak, torments of snow and icy wind - to Pesclani and on hill 1192. On the Golico the enemy, alternating the units very frequently, did not stop to insist and launch themselves to the investment of the summit. For three days and three nights the valorous II/48th infantry, defense in place of those positions, supported the action although the bleeding white imposed from the violence of the attack and the cold. Then reduced to 96 men, after two further Greek assaults supported most intense fire, was forced to yield to the overwhelming forces withdrawing to the already predisposed strong point at hill 1615, last northern hill of the Golico. The same day (20 February) also the Pesclani had to be cleared. But on the rest of the front the defense held well and the attempts to come down the Vojussa valley from Mt. Groppa cost the adversary the most serious losses, truly tried.

The 5th Greek division was exhausted. Its engagement had provoked, as natural repercussion, a remarkable lightening to the front of the Deshnices valley: in order to reinforce some regiments others had been practically dissolved. Also the logistic difficulties were always greater. After all it was a necessary pause. And this was granted by the weather, that it continued to turn decidedly to worse. From the 20 to 26 February, while low the torrential rains swelled the water course, up the snow and torments did not give it rest, uniting the combatants in a period of pains and sacrifices. In these days, on the Shendeli and the Golico it was simply dealt pure and to tear the life to the ferocious bite of the cold and to the deadly breath of the icy wind. The few Greeks who were taken captive, also being better equipped than the Italians, narrated with fright the suffering put up with also from them. A hundred frozen were cleared and every operating activity had to be suspended. To increase the hard conditions of the troops online, the flood of the Vojussa still swept up the bridges of boats and footbridges the throws in the Tepeleni zone

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

and more to the valley. Only moving the routes of supply and evacuation on the ways of communication of the VIII Corps, with improvised ferries and difficult aerial supply drops, it was possible to exceed the serious situation that had been created for the units of the *Legnano* and the *Sforzesca*.

The afternoon of the 20th Geloso received by Cavallero in order to discuss on the course of the battle in the sector of the XXV Corps. The critical point was the Golico; until the situation to north of the Vojussa resisted was not dangerous; its fall instead, would have of blow, had reflected worrisome on the Shendeli. In the meantime, while the *Susa* was crossing the Devoli in cableway (time being necessary for the passage: 16 hours), the *Tolmezzo* battalion, the first one of the *Julia*, began the ferry on the Vojussa with doubled boats and the hope to succeed to complete the passage in the evening. For the previewed offensive action, Geloso express clearly the warning that the *Julia* alone was not sufficient to the need: from the moral and material conditions put into effect that were necessary, in offensive case, to obtain sure success. If some doubt existed, were better to renounce. The *Puglie* was not ready and it would not have been before one week. The *Modena* was not usable for serious deficiencies in the field of the armament and the *Bari* was only slightly better. The deficiencies were showy, also for the materials, and in case of necessity not there was other to make that to line up the *Julia* in front of the Shendeli, in defensive. Also knowing the Cavallero situation he was not convinced: place that had to resist a pair of weeks in wait to have the possibility to assume the initiative finally, of he derived the necessity to hold the Golico at all costs, to concentrate the *Julia* and to study the features of an action departing from the field of the VIII Corps. Therefore the *Julia*, that it absorbed the *Susa*, could unitarily be employed but, respecting integrity of the battalions and maintaining, compatibly with the circumstances, a strong staggering in depth in order to guarantee the balance possession of the flank of the grip of Dragoti: the Golico and the Beshishtit. Its use would have concurred the gradual regression of the *Legnano* and the *Pizzi* alpine group (whose battalions were remained with two hundred men each), of which were necessary to supply to more soon for the remittance in efficiency. In the evening conversation of the 22nd Cavallero informed Mussolini of the decision taken:

"(...) Today we have not had actions of note. From our part has happened the approach of the *Julia* in Vojussa valley to south of the Trebeshines-Shendeli (...). has made a large sacrifice, because I wanted to hold this unit in hand

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

for other goals, but I have had to supply in way total to that point that, as you have seen, is most delicate.

We have had a small displeasure on the Golico, one small hill has been taken by the enemy, but he has not been able to come in down. Our alignment is strong and between yesterday and the day before yesterday we have put in place alpine units and of infantry constituting a flank that does not yield more. From the other part today the enemy has tried to come down from the Rump on Klisura. They were a hundred of men and probably it was a matter of an experiment. They have found the alignment of the bersaglieres that has cut them with a scythe, putting of to ground great part, making to escape the others and taking three prisoners ⁽²²⁾. I await the result of their interrogation (...).

I had saved the *Julia* up to now; I have had to employ it three or four days before when I meant, but since I have put online a few people not feel the effect of any. The order is for a unitary employment.

You see, Duce, and excused if I allow myself to say t you of the explanations [sic]: today we have three things that we did not have before: a tidy alignment of infantry (the route to me has been withdraws and of our supply reservoir reordering them); a organized alignment of artillery; a logistic apparatus that works. In these conditions of war it is gone well. Now account to prepare all in time for the final circle, as You have said.

I think that the action of Tepeleni is failed. What probably in direction of Valona will be still some small, but we are in a position to facing it and while we prepar(...). Watched, Duce, the Greeks for this attack have carried ahead of the units that were in ordering and that for a long time they did not fight. The "Cretan" was a type of ghost division, about which it was spoken from much time. There is but of the dissatisfaction and many they say that deserting in great numbers if it were not for fear of their families, that they are in hand of the Greeks. And this is not only said from the deserters, but also from the prisoners (...)"⁽²³⁾.

The transfer of a pair of days the taken *Julia*. On the 24th, Gen. Rossi sketch completed the orders for the insertion of the division online (n. 92): the 8th alpine on the Vojussa, with the *Tolmezzo* at hill 161.5 of the Golico and with the task to organize to retake the summit; the *Susa* and the *Cividale* in the Zagorias valley; the *Gemona* in second group to north of Dragoti. The 9th alpine the Shendeli, with the *Aquila* in Mezgorani valley with task of resistance to the last; the *Vicenza* on Mt. Beshishtit.

After the attack to the Golico the battle for the moment languished. The combats from the 9th to the 22nd had been hard for the defender but hardest for the forward, that had been bleed dry and the accused evidently

22) The reference regards the obstruction constituted from unit of the 2nd bersaglieres to the grip of Ura Mucio Husos, to four kilometers from Klisura, between Mt. Groppa and the Brezhanit, in Italian hand in spite of wide was always dominated from north and south.

23) Diary Cavallero, date 22.2.1941.

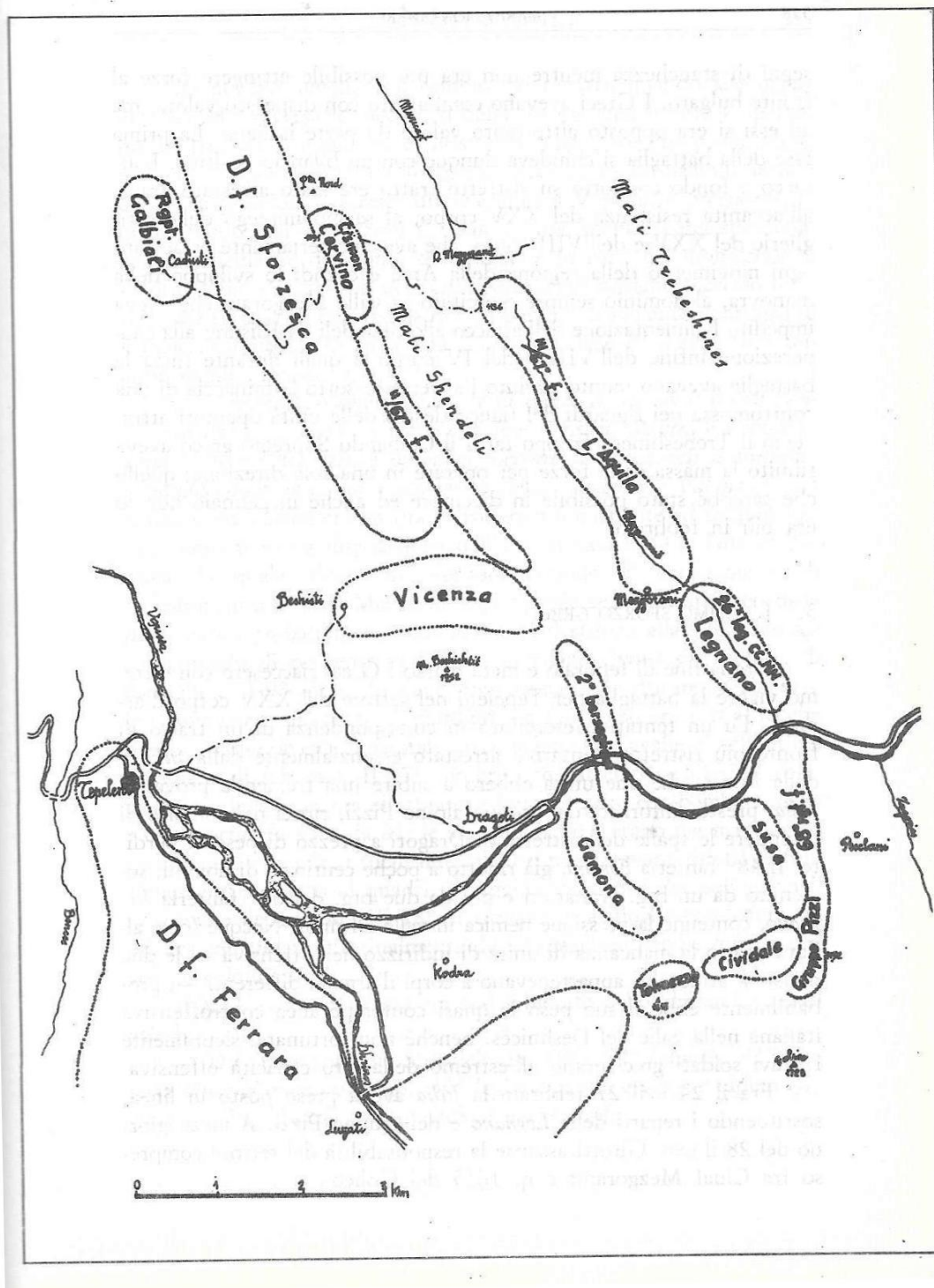
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 557

The situation in the sector of Tepeleni 25 February

Schizzo n. 92

LA SITUAZIONE NEL SETTORE DI TEPELENI IL 25 FEBBRAIO



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

signs of fatigue while it was not more possible to reach forces to the Bulgarian front. The Greeks had fought with deprived of hope value, but to they value from the Italian side was opposite equally. The first phase of the battle was closed therefore with a positive budget. The attack in depth lead on narrow feature had been arrested thanks to the tireless resistance of the XXV Corps; a testament to the employment of the artilleries of the XXV and VIII Corps, that they had seriously hindered every movement ion the region of the Arze and therefore the development of the maneuver; to the always exercised dominion in Mezgorani valley that had prevented the feeding of the attack to the Shendeli from Klisura; to the cooperation finally of the VIII and IV Corps, which during all the battle had held fascinate the adversary under the threat of a counter maneuver in the cares of the right flank of the operating units through the Trebeshines. Much too late the Greek High command had re-united the mass of the forces in order to operate in one single direction; what it would have been possible in December and also in January it was not more in February.

3. THE LAST GREEK EFFORT.

Between the end of February and mid March the Greeks relit with extreme vigor the battle for Tepeleni in the field of the XXV Army Corps. It was an attempt exercised in correspondence of a feature of more narrow forehead, attempt arrested essentially from the *Julia* and the *Ferrara*. The two units had to endure one tremendous test: the *Julia*, just reinforced from the Pizzi alpine group, succeeded in the task to defend the flank of the grip of Dragoti at the price of heavy losses. The 48th *Ferrara* infantry, already reduced to little hundreds of men, supported from a grenadiers Bn. and then from two Bns. of the 67th *Legnano* infantry, contained the enemy pressure in the Dhrinos valley. Harmed perhaps to the adversary the lack of unit of address in the offensive - the two attacking divisions belonged to different army corps -, probably had its weight nearly the contemporary Italian counter-offensive in the valley of the Deshnices, although not fortunate, sure the good Greek soldiers were to the end of their offensive ability.

Between the 24th and 27 February the *Julia* had taken to place online, replacing the units of the *Legnano* and the Pizzi group. At noon of the 28th Gen. Girotti assumed the responsibility of the field comprised between Chiaf Mezgoranit and hill 1615 of the Golico.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

As soon as the change of the units had happened, when to the first lights of the 28th of the adversary, aware of the substitution in action and hoping to take advantage of the crisis moment and to achieve a first affirmation, was launch in a strongest attack in formations locked against the advance positions of left Vojussa river, and just those estates from the battalions *Cividale* and *Susa*, while aerial bombing the vicinities of the bridge of Dragoti and the zone of the monastery of Kodra. In the initial impetuous the Greeks obtained some limited success, but he was what of short duration because a violent one counterassault cutting behind. The blaze was extinguished at once and the attempt had not followed immediate.

On 10 March Cavallero emanated the directive n. 19: "*the events are evolved - he said - towards the decisive phase. While it is necessary to lock the times of the offensive action, it is especially necessary to keep itself ready to demolish eventual opposing impulses towards Berat, Tepeleni and Valona*" ⁽²⁴⁾. The threat on Valona still was considered immanent and in this optical it came put to disposition of the 11th Army the *Lupi di Toscana* Inf. Div, which, after an ulterior period of amalgam and training in Mavrova zone, in the lodgings abandoned by the *Julia*, a lot probably would have been destined the Sushica valley concurring to concentrate the entire division *Cuneo* on the shoreline, to collect the 9th alpine in Smokthina valley and to withdraw *Acqui* at Mavrova for its turn to reorder. But the *Lupi* was anything but that to place, like had stated by Cavallero personally in the last week of February. The 77th infantry, that it attended further complements, had to still carry out the lessons of shooting with hand grenades and mortars of 45 mm. and 81 mm.; the radio stations were but the wireesses operator and the batteries lacked; the guns machine gunners introduced operation defects; how much to the pictures, the regiment had two single officials in permanent service. The 78th were found in analogous conditions, in more were commanded temporally by a major because a still lacking in the colonel.

The XXV Army Corps as was deployed from the Shendeli to the Kurvelesh:
- *Sforzesca* Inf. Div. on the Shendeli with the 53rd and 54th infantry, 41st, *Modena* infantry (less a Bn.), 30th cc.nn. legion and " Signorini" alpine group (*Bolzano Bn*, *Val Cismon* and *Cervino*);

24) DSCSFAA, f 02749/op. dated 1.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

- *Julia* Inf. Div. astride the Vojussa with the 8th and 9th, alpine, Susa Bn., "Pizzi" alpine group (*Val Natisone*, *Val Fella* and *Val Tagliamento* Bns), 2nd bersaglieres and 26th cc.nn. legion;

- *Ferrara* Inf. Div. in Dhrinos valley with 47th and 48th infantry, 82nd cc.nn. legion and II/3rd grenadiers;

- *Modena* Inf. Div. on the plateau of Progonat with the 232nd infantry *Brennero*, 18th infantry *Acqui* and 36th cc.nn. legion;

- *Brennero* Inf. Div. at the head of the Salarije valley with 231st infantry and 45th cc.nn. legion.

In reserve the *Legnano*, the 5th bersaglieres - a pair of scarni battalions of which they knit the *Ferrara* with the *Modena* - the "Galbiati" cc.nn. grouping and the 42nd infantry of the *Modena* that was being reordered.

They faced the Italian forces: the 5th Inf. Div. (Gen. Papasterghiu) of the II Corps against the *Sforzesca*; the 17th Inf. Div. (Gen. Pousopoulos), it also of the II Corps, and leave of the 2nd Inf. Div. (Gen. Labdas) of I Corps against the *Julia*; part of the 2nd Inf. Div. against the *Ferrara*. The sector limit between the Greek II and I Corps were represented from the Vojussa, so that in front of the *Julia* the inner wings of the two army corps were found, with in second formation, respective, the 6th Inf. Div. (Gen. Markos), in course of influx from the Korçano, and the 4th Inf. Div. (Gen. Boulalas). Under the tactical profile it can be observed that the Greeks had made to refold our outpost line of resistance to Chiaf Mezgoranit, practically caught up the outlet of Zagorias valley, rejected until to the northern extremity of the Golico the defense of the ridge, but to price of bloody sacrifices that had remarkably affected their force of penetration. From part of the defense it had been everywhere checked every attempt of breach with some limited regression; but just in the features in which it had to reflect, after bitter combats, the thickness of the resistance position was now paltry. A push lead with adequate forces and a good staggering in depth would have had probably the possibility at least to arrive to the front of the Tepeleni, rejecting the men of the *Julia* and the *Ferrara* from the positions on which found, positions dominated from the heights in Greek hand and lacking in the necessary depth (sketch n. 93).

Some time the Greeks exercised isolated local efforts, of day and night, while the XXV Corps perfected the defensive order once again throwing the bridges of boats and the semi-permanent footbridges

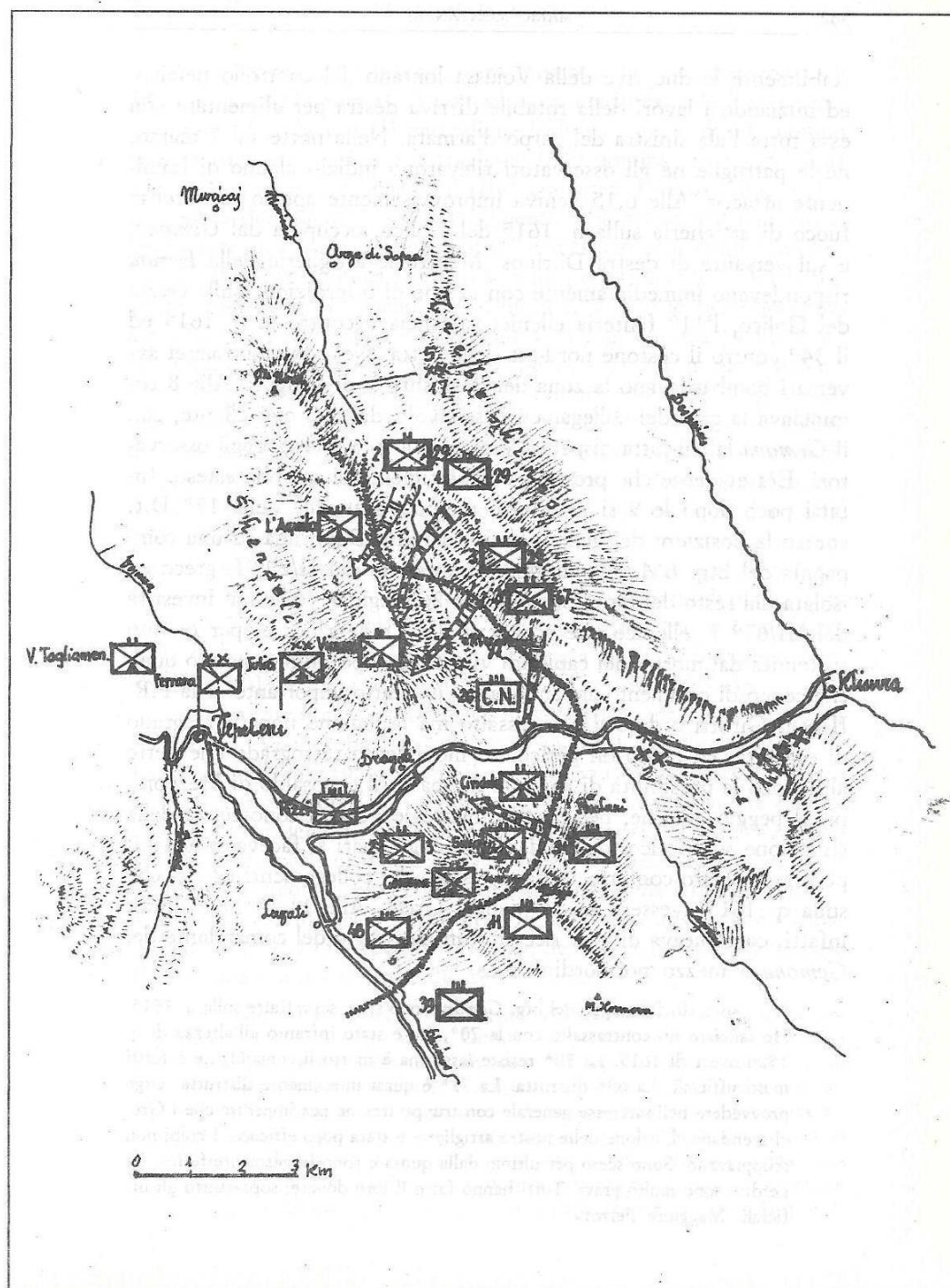
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 561

The resumption of the Greek offensive on Tepeleni (7-12 March)

Schizzo n. 93

LA RIPRESA DELL'OFENSIVA GRECA SU TEPELENI (7-12 MARZO)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the two rivers of the Vojussa far away from the enemy control, and beginning the work of the roadway to the right of the river for feeding with it all the left wing of the army corps. In the night on 7 March, of it the patrols of it the observatories found indication some of imminent attack. At 06:15 it came without warning opened an intense fire of artillery on hill 1615 of the Golico, occupied by the *Gemona*, and on the right slope of the Dhrinos. While the artilleries of the *Ferrara* answered immediately with action of interdiction on the crest of the Golico, the Greek 11th infantry was launch against hill 1615 and the 34th against crest of the northeast of the summit. In with time enemy aircraft bombed the zone of the Beshishtit and Dragoti. At 08:00 the crisis of the connections, upset from the shooting began throbbing, with the *Gemona* whose hopeless fight was only seen as a continuation from the observatories. It was obvious that soon the combat would have extended. In fact soon after 09:00 a new attack of the 17th Inf. Div. against the positions of the valley of Mezgorani was manifested. At first it was one company of the Bn. *Aquila* being engaged by the Greek II/29th Inf. and isolated from the rest of the unit, therefore the 26th cc.nn. legion was invested by the Greek III/67th Inf. that came down from the Trebeshines and, for supported how much from mortars of the strong points winners, after an hour showed some signal of yielding abandoning an important feature of the P.R. Gen. Girotti ordered the counter assault but the legion was not in a position to executing it and began a dangerous retrograde movement that said to the enemy the possibility to go around from the below the strong point of Mezgorani. Worse it was that, for how much the exact acquaintance lacked the situation on the Golico, from the course of fire made road the hypothesis - soon confirmed from restoration of the r.t. connections - than on hill 1615 had placed foot the Greeks. At 11:15 the 8th alpine, in fact, communicated to have received a message of the commander of *Gemona* by means of a messengers:

"10:00 hours. The troops of the *Gemona* Bn. have been overwhelmed on hill 1615. I have launch a counter assault with the 70th, but it has been smashed to the height of hill 1500 west of 1615. The 70th resist up there but the commander is died and many officers wounded. The 69th destroyed. The 71st nearly are entirely destroyed. It urges to supply in the general interest with fresh troops in order to prevent that the Greeks come down. The action of our artilleries has been little effective. The blows did not burst. They are come down for last from the height and are lightly hurt. The losses are very serious. All have done theirs duty, above all the officials. Generals Perrat".

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

On the right of the Dhrinos infantry of the *Ferrara* had moved the 39th euzones against the 48th, that it had in front line, on the western slopes of the Golico, the III battalion (reduced to less than 500 men although reinforced) and the I battalion (200 men); in reserve the II (approximately 140 men) to Kodra and the II/3rd grenadiers to shelter of hill 1615. The fall of the hill placed the regiment, that it had very resisted to the first assault, in one difficult condition: whichever movement in the regimental field could be observed perfectly, the III battalion was struck on the flank, I by enfilade, the II and the baggage train were easily blows from the shooting of mortars. It was necessary to resort to a modification of the alignment, compensated at least in part from the arrival, in the night, of two Bns of the 67th infantry and of the 68th cc.nn. Bn. These partial successes of the push rendered the moment delicate. Not having forces to the hand in order to adorn more serious eventualities, which could be determined to short expiration, Gen. Girotti asked the *Val Felta*, which already it had been put on alarm at Kodra and that at once part on the Golico was started and leaves on the full of rocks spurs to southeast of Beshishtit. In the afternoon the entire *Julia* was under pressure. To north the Greeks had caught up the high eastern slopes of the Shendeli with the 29th Inf. and the III 67^o Inf., contrasted by the rests of the Bn. The *Aquila*, a company of which continued to resist completely isolated, and from the *Vicenza*; to south the Cividale and the *Susa* after only after actions were succeed the Greek 34th resolutions to reject, but they were dominated by the Golico. He came called to the fire also the *Val Tagliamento*, from Turan. At nightfall, but the enemy gave up the effort and did not chase in order not to give truce and to pick the fruit of its action. Gotten hold of hill 1615, under which the rests of the Gemona were always held; next to place foot on the Beshishtit, at 20:15 it delivered a violent blow against this flank of the grip of Dragoti, with the indirect assistance of an ulterior attack against *Susa* and *Cividale*. At 22:00 hill 1437, eastern spur of the Shendeli and optimal line of departure against the crest line, fell.

"While also on rocky crest that they give the Beshishtit it comes down into the Vojussa valley at hill 162 -, Gen. Girotti wrote - the situation introduced never critical how much, because the cc.nn. units of the 26th legion, reduced by now to a few remainder, had lost tie and consistency, while the opposing forces increased slightly of number and audacity. It needed to maintain the absolutely possession of the said rocky crest. The 269th, already started in direction of hill 1191, had to guarantee the possession of the high part -- such company, already in march from the hours 13, had by now to be reached destination - urged to move some unit between the center part of it and hill 372.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

I did not have any to disposition; in the locality of the Monastero di Kodra it was *Val Natisone* Bn, amounting in all to a hundred of men and making part, with *Val Felta* and the *Tagliamento* of the Pizzi group. Given the urgency, I ordered to the commander of the 8th alpine to employ it for the above indicated goal.

For every eventuality I had moreover foreshadowed, since from the morning, the 2nd bersaglieres rgt. so that kept themselves ready for the defense to be entrusted of the strong points of Dragoti and Dragoti bridge.

The losses endured by us in the day appeared already serious; from every part asked the shipment of reinforcements. And the plea of who is first of all and of the critical moments for us. Someone could also overestimate losses and situations, but sure the units were losing weight. In the forecast not to be able to make assignment on other units coming from the rear, I arranged, in order to reinforce the Rgt. and to have other forces on hand, that the maximum number was carried online leading of, the base of the division of all was emptied the elements, collected the handicraftsmen company, couriers and attending of the Commander of the division, the CC.RR. still available, for being able all to employ and to carry online (...)" ⁽²⁵⁾.

In the night, during the completion of the preparations for the counterattacks, while the units were reinforced or try and leading the less trim positions and with the inflow of other personnel recovered everywhere, the enemy reiterated the attempt to break the line and at 01:00 it reached to occupy hill 739 in the Vojussa valley. Soon after but they began to arrive - to the Commander of the *Julia* good innovation: elements of the *Vicenza* resumed hill 1437 of the Shendeli, at dawn of 8 March hill 739 was retaken by the *Cividale* and towards 06:00 the *Val Fella* began advancing slowly, methodical, tenacious, hard towards the northern tip of Golico. The first news came at, 11:10 from an observatory: "*Many men departing from the extreme north of hill 1615 have taken to possession of all the hill defensive works. Many others from hill 1615 go towards hill 1624*". Soon the confirmation reached. After alternate vicissitudes, fighting meter for meter, hill 1615 had been retook and this time definitively. To assert that with that the situation had been restored would be too much: a solution of continuity between the 8th and 9th alpine and camicie nere existed did not demonstrate the necessary firmness in order to still resist in val Vojussa. Defensive riser came therefore constituted, to claim a control line, to east of the bridge of Dragoti with a handicraftsmen co., one carabinieri co. and elements of the quartermaster general of the division.

In the meantime the Commander of the 11th Army had seen with a

25) Report of Gen. Girotti on the fact of arms.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

sure worry the resumption of the February battle. It preceded of two days the offensive of the VIII and IV Corps and if the enemy were successful to make to fall the Golico and Beshishtit and to get hold of Tepeleni it would have removed to the Italian initiative great part of its effectiveness. The parts would be inverted and while the troops of the two army corps would have put foot in the Deshnices valley and eventually on the Mali Trebeshines and, quite, to Klisura, the Greeks, lined up on the Shendeli and the Golico, and benefited also from the full possession of the Brezhanit and of Zagorias valley, they could have fed their defense of Tepeleni for the valley of the Dhrinos and to deepen the success one towards Valona. It was therefore indispensable that the XXV Corps held to whichever price the position of resistance from Muriçaj to the Golico and, in order to make forehead to such requirement, it came posted to disposition the *Legnano*, in reorganization at Sinanaj. With this availability Gen. Rossi infantry the 48th of the *Ferrara* reinforced with two Bns. of the 67th, held the third in reserve to the monastery of Kodra and left in zone the 42nd Inf. of the *Modena* that would have had to transfer to the rear.

In the opposing field the feeling was showing oneself that the situation same in order to escape definitively of hand. Gen. Drakos, commander of the Section of the Army with the Epirus, meet at Athens in order to participate to a meeting to highest level, had said with clarity that the wear & tear of his troops was such not to concur ulterior efforts. On the front to the insistence of Papagos in order to continue the pressure on Tepeleni, it decidedly maintained just the point of view specifying that, in order to resume the offensive with some hope of resolution, the army had need to more replace with units drawn from the reserves of the High command the three tried divisions: the 2nd, 5th and 17th. And, since the change would have demanded three weeks at least, would in any case not have been possible to attack before the end of the month. The result was that on 6 March gen. Pitsikas, commander of the Section of armed of western Macedonian, replaced Drakos in the command of the Section of armed of Epirus⁽²⁶⁾, Gen Demestikas took the place of Gen. Kosmas to I army corps and the Gen. Bakos, already commander of the 3rd Inf. Div., assumed the command of the II Corps in place of Gen. Papadopoulos. The exoneration of the three Generals was an extreme attempt to in a hurry to reach a conclusion in Albania. Papagos by now found with the back to the wall because the Germans on 1 March

²⁶⁾ Gen. Pitsikas came replaced in the command of the army of Macedonian by Gen. Tsolakoglou.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

they were entered Bulgaria and unavoidably they would have made soon burst into Greece, here where this was defenseless. Also to proceed at all costs and in any point, Papagos meant that they came continues the attempt to smash the resistance.

Now was the 17th Inf. Div. that attacked in force on the Beshishtit and the Shendelj, now the 2nd Inf. Div. that resumed the effort to south of the Vojussa. And here, in the late afternoon of 8 March, the things got worse for the XXV Corps. The *Susa*, that it had endured the most important losses among which all the officials, reduced to a hundred of men had had to degrade after a tenacious resistance, being discovered the *Civiale* that did not amount to 250 combatants. The 9th - that day the IV and VIII Corps began the offensive - was another hard day. The mountain battalions appeared seriously tired. Three battalion commanders, many company commanders had fallen, very many subordinates. The companies were remained with little tens of men. In those conditions it counterattacks became utopian. But it could still resisted on the place and this came made, holding on with the teeth. Everywhere renewed assaults were rejected. Also on the Golico that garrison had carried on the fight, nearly block, arresting very four successes attempts in awaiting of reinforcements that they could not be granted. Only the reinforcements, only aid, the fire of the artilleries of the *Julia* and the *Ferrara*. The falling of the night saw the Greeks asserted on the eastern positions of the Beshishtit as well as on the northeast spur of the Golico. For all the day following from Italian part it was fought in order to resume those heights that gave too much advantage to the adversary and from Greek side in order to make still a pass, the last one, and to catch up the crest of the Shendeli - Beshishtit and the hill 1615. Neither of the two contenders succeeded in the attempt: truly they were exhausted. For how much it was necessary for the *Julia* to dive out the enemy, at least little, the conditions of its units did not allow a fast resumption because the losses endured in officers, non-commissioned officers, soldiers and arms did not allow the indispensable cohesion and consistency. They had been reinforced, in part, with elements removed from the coming from baggage train or from the care places, but it wanted well other! It was necessary therefore to attend little, to resume breath. Moreover on the Beshishtit, in order to carry out the previewed action an organic company was necessary at least, than for the moment it was impossible to gain from the garrison of the resistance position. While ardent the work of reordering of the companies, at eleven of 14 March the enemy renewed the attack, concentrating the effort exclusively on the height in order to unhinge the two

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

pillars of the grip of Dragoti. Thrown against the Beshishtit and still it had been rejected. An hour later was the time of hill 1615 of the Golico but in vain. At 17:00 it was repeated the attempt against both the positions at the same time and then again at 20:00, but always uselessly. The 12th see knock down all to assaults, than by now were continuing for a good five days, the Greeks changed design suddenly, heading along the single right slope of the Vojussa valley, to mid coast and towards - low, with the obvious sight to isolate therefore the defense on the height and to force them as a result of falling. At 07:00 hours the 17th Inf. Div. attacked the rocky crest to south-east of the Beshishtit held by the remainder of the 26th cc.nn. legion. This, lacking the legion commander and a battalion commander, wounded previously fallen, subordinate to the unexpected and most violent action, nearly at once it yielded allowing the enemy to take the flank the contiguous elements. In short all the left shoulder of the bottom valley obstruction fall: the way in order to insinuate itself on Dragoti was open. Only the participation of all the artillery available, of elements of the 2nd bersaglieres and the *Val Tagliamento* succeeded to freeze the situation, but not to resolve it. But it was resolved by itself. The enemy was not in a position to act. The agrees information supplied from the prisoners and from the deserters they gave as the 29th infantry (17th Inf. Div.) decimates the hardest in the combats let alone the 11th and the 34th Inf. (2nd Inf. Div.). And the units of 14th and the 36th infantry, already in second group, were not much better. It points out of works in progress, it finds to you in the same evening of 11 March on the eastern slopes them of the Shendeli, constituted sure indication that the adversary had exhausted the own offensive push and he was arranged to the better with the probable attempt to take breath. And finally they arrived a battalion complements for the 8th alpine with which reinvigorated the regiment and one of the 68th infantry *Legnano*. The losses endured between the 7th and the 12th were strong: 446 officers and 8,000 non-commissioned officers and soldiers outside combat.

In all this period the fields of the *Modena* and the *Brennero*, the left of the XXV Corps, saw the activity reduced to normal actions of patrol and of artillery, it is for the natural stagnation of the operations due - in position of high mountain, resupplied along difficult mule tracks - to the rigor of the climate and of the inclemency, it is above all to the fact that the Commander of the Greek Corps in order to concentrate the efforts against the defense between Dhrinos and Vojussa had embezzled to every other part of the front all that that could remove without to compromise of integrity. On plain of Lekdushaj the only event of relief

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

was an attack of some carried out consistency on 26 February and regularly blunted. For the rest, simple daily and methodical mortar shooting on cart track of Bençes valley and the town of Lekdushaj. Also to the head of Salarije valley the situation remained to long stationary.

The last action of the battle of Tepeleni was represented from the arrival of the *Lupi di Toscana* (Gen. Reisoli) and its consequent insertion in the field of the Vojussa. The evening of the 12th, in fact, Gen. Geloso determined to put major unit to disposition of the XXV Corps for the unitary employment, meant to solidly guarantee "*with defense to the end of the Vojussa valley bottom obstruction to protection of the bridge of Dragoti*", carrying the ahead as far as possible towards the east same obstruction. The *Julia* had to continue to hold the flanks of the grip. The long initial strategic defensive battle on the positions of the *reduced center* in the first decade of December in order to assure the vital objectives of the theater - Valona, Tepeleni and Berat - was finally gained. It was dealt to resume the initiative of the operations with an offensive. It remains to emphasize the negative persistence of the employment of the units outside from the normal organic boundaries. And true that often the provision had been adopted under the urgency of situations that imposed a fast solution, but is at least doubt that this rapidity involved always the breach of tidy ties. Not to case during the first phase of the battle Gen. Geloso had thought necessary a personal letter to Gen. Rossi:

"To confirmation my previous repeated written orders and oral memo to you the absolute necessity to give again without delay to all the units under your orders their complete organisms, essential base of their spiritual and combative efficiency.

If at the beginning of the campaign the vastness of the fields to defend and following unexpected critical situations in several the points of the front could justify the division and the splitting up of some units, today no serious reason can excuse persisting of every a harmful and system extremely contrary to logical principle of employment (...).

Hold well present, Excellency, than in the defense and in the attack of a position it sure renders more an unit homogenous, even if numerically reduced lessened, than a complex of forces of greater size without organic and spiritual ties that cannot resist to the test of fire (...)"⁽²⁷⁾.

27) DS Commando 11th army, f. 023938/op. dated 17.2.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

4. REFLECTION IN THE POLITICAL - MILITARY AREA.

Since the January month three elements weighed on the strategic thought of Gen. Cavallero: the hypothesis of the breach of the front, the German participation and the necessity to resume the initiative of the operations before this participation. As far as the first point synthesized a schematic study in the operating memorandum existed already one n. 1, that he previewed a general withdraw with rear alignment in two distinguished blocks: one to defense of supported northern Albania at Skumbini, the other the defense of Valona. It was resumed in consideration first of February before the Greek offensive, not for pessimism but for a normal modernization of the relative plans to the several possibilities, in fact it does not turn out any has been pointed out to Mussolini. The situation was considerably improved for the greater availability of forces (four divisions in more to the 11th Army and one to the 9th Army), one more satisfactory logistic organization, a sure equilibrium between the two adversaries. Also not being able therefore to exclude itself of the all depreciable hypothesis of a withdrawn maneuver in, the presupposed ones emerged in order to contain it in more modest limits, avoiding especially that separation of the troops into two block imposed from the situation of the last month. A good occupation of the fluvial line Devoli - Semeni was lend to the performance of such concept, already chosen for the delaying action in the previous study. The new line introduced a little advanced development, altogether, to that one previewed (220 km rather than 200) with the advantage of the continuous alignment, the unit of command, the smaller entity of the withdraw and finally of being able counting, to back, on the line of the Skumbini like doubling for every eventuality. Moreover it offered to two optimal offensives outlets, Fieri and Elbasan, on the flanks of the enemy device.

On the German participation in a generalized manner, contacts between the Comando Supremo and the OKW had lead to an agreement signed from Keitel and Guzzoni on 5 February on the directives for the employment of Germanic troops on Italian theaters of operations, comprised Albania. The agreement, also admitting the operating dependency of said troops from the Comandante Superiore, specified that where to they it came entrusted a task *"whose execution, for conviction of their commander, could only carry to a serious failure and therefore to disablement of the prestige of the German troops, the German commander has the right and the duty, informing the German general of connection of the Comando Supremo in Rome, to ask the decision for the Fuehrer means of the Commander"*

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

in Chief of the army ". The issue regarded essentially Libya, because, as it has been seen, the shipment of a Germanic division in Albania it was not thought opportune, but is a fact that only 24 February Mussolini communicated to Cavallero of to have declined the offer.

As far as resuming very soon the initiative of the operations, the insistence from part of Mussolini is known. Also Cavallero thought necessary to put in conditions for delivering the great offensive of the Korçano at the same time with the entrance in field of the German army from Bulgaria, but, to part this understanding for which it had already traced the fundamental elements of the plan, tried to move in some field in order to resolve or at least to improve local situations. The acute thorn was that one than Klisura. In any case it was necessary to predispose the instrument. And here it must, first of all, speak about the general state of the units. And asserted state that "*the troops of Albania of 1941 could die but not gain*"⁽²⁸⁾. Dealing with a phrase to effect, but contains some element of truth. When, on 10 February, Cavallero had asserted to Mussolini that the situation was radically changed from first of December, he had exposed the truth. Sure, to watch the topographical map and to consider the course of the line in connection with orography of the theater, there was from asking themselves if it would have been possible, given the previous events, preventing a back. However the much completed work began to give its yields and if also during the battle of Tepeleni the Commander of the 11th Army and that one with the XXV Corps had been forced to supply quickly for the overcoming of some difficult moment, the real danger of a breach of the front did not exist more. And this also under the psychological aspect. The picture that the inspector of the P.N.F., Parini, compiled in that period for the Secretary of the Party in Rome, Serene, is very different from that one described in January to Ciano:

My previous messages to E. V. referred to the examination of the reasons of the moral depression of which they gave to signs the troops that came disembarking in Albania. It was unfortunately true that large and small units seemed hit from a morose form of melancholic fatalism and resignation that it increased as they approached the line of the fire (...).

The arrival of the Gen. Cavallero has marked the beginning of the moral and technical resumption because immediately it has been felt that the organization of the services had a firm guide and strong-willed person (...).

28) E. CANEVARI, *La guerra italiana*, Tosi, Rome 1948, vol. II, pag. 342.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

I have reported to E. V. that in the moments of the greater military and moral crisis of the first eight weeks of the war the attitude of some Commander had been lend to several interpretations, for sure tendencies to the critic of political character and search of political responsibilities and technical absolutely inopportune from part of who had urgent and contingent military responsibilities of the front to an enemy advance. That could have serious consequences for the moral of the same troops.

The personal and directed work of General Cavallero has served to make to quickly disperse these symptoms of a mentality that was not in compliance with the gravity and to the duties of the hour and is necessary to say that the atmosphere of all the High Commanders is now only dominated from one single will and one admirable effort for the war.

The last weeks have carried to a decided improvement in the state of mind of the troops and the combative spirit is in fervent increase in every unit. The contingents that disembark from Italy demonstrate greater confidence and the organization of the services of the rear gives at once a sense of order and means ability that the combatant relieves. The logistic means of the army and the immense frame of the places of comfort and sales of illegal or counterfeit items of the Party in all the rear end under the lines, cancel in the mind of the combatant the first sense of desolation that the Country communicates to all.

The arrival of plentiful artillery is also reason of moral consolidating and the generous action and continues of aviation well serves to determine that conscience of the superiority on the Greek that gives the loss of Koritza in then had made place to a type of heroic but resigned fatalism.

Other can of course be asserted that there is in all a high sense of the duty and a magnificent serenity of mind to the sacrifice that is continuous, and serious, while it is gone making road one be of mind of deep hostility to the Greeks to which is wanted to be given a hard lesson (...) "⁽²⁹⁾".

That the moral resumption was in action is unquestionable, but the too many deficiencies of a launch military organism in a offensive war without some preparation could not be cancelled in the period of time of a pair of months, when the logistic organization was just starting and the transports via sea remained an unsurpassable tie. In fact evident symptoms indicated that the convalescence was not still to the term. Gen. Geloso was seen induced to recall the Commanders of major unit on the little satisfactory disciplinary course, under the profiles of the substance and the shape:

"(...) If that can be in part excused for the units from more months in front line, where particular requirements and the organization deficiency carry to a forced slackening of disciplinary ties, is not absolutely permissible for the units just arriving from Italy and for the units already from a sure period concentrated to the bases for their renewal.

29) Letter s.n. dated 22.2.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

In the immense and deep work of rehabilitation, that he must be carried out from all in depth (...), the commanders of the G.U., regiment, battalion and such company their attention carries all on serious deficiencies, that I mean are eliminated to the more soon (...)"⁽³⁰⁾.

But the aspect more worrisome was constituted from the entity of the lost arms declared by unit after every action in which a retrograde movement had been had. The level of the losses had touched, in some cases, 66% of machineguns gunners, 50% of the machine-guns and even 85% of mortars. It is also true that with the stabilization of the forehead the phenomenon had decreased; it is also true that the loss of 81 mm mortars it heavy affected the lack of armours for the support, that it imposed painful cargos to men excessive debilitated from the hard work of the combats and the climatic adversities; but undoubtedly the thing was too much important in order not to demand hard provisions:

"(...) Warn that the Country is not in a position to continuing to supply in this measure to reinstate, than already in therefore short period of campaign is demonstrated necessary, - Geloso wrote - I render responsible in matter all the commanders of G.U. and providing to the exoneration of the commanders near whose unit will come to take place the deplored fact now" ⁽³¹⁾.

Cavallero was found therefore to employ a war instrument that had caught up a good *defensive ability*, as place in evidence from the battle of Tepeleni, but not still necessary the *offensive ability* for an action of breach and the operation in Deshnicas valley will demonstrate it.

Mussolini perceived the need to *speak* to Italy, breaking the silence that he had taste of guilt. He convened for 23 February the hierarchies of the roman fascism at the Adrian theatre in Rome and in such center, after along generic preamble, he openly commented the events on the various theaters. Those taken place in Albania were the more burning. From too much time it knew of having to *explain* that that was happened on the Greek forehead. The responsibilities began with pointing out to the general public:

"(...) The last support to Great Britain on the continent was and is Greece, the only nation that it does not have intentional to renounce to the British guarantee. It was necessary to face it and on this point the agreement of all the military factors

30) DS Commander 11th Army, f. 023918fop. dated 17.2.1941.

31) Ibid, f. 1697 dated R.P. 5.2.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

responsible were absolute. I add that also the operations plan, prepared from the Comando Superiore of the Armed Forces in Albania, unanimously was approved of, without reserve of risen and he was not asked, in the interval between the decision and the beginning of the action, than a delay of two days".

He was not lying. He simply communicated a part of the truth. That one that he made him comfortable was known. He did not *add that the responsible military factors* had approved of operations plans based on premised and political situations that the truth had demonstrated of all the nonexistent ones, but to which he had himself to be believed because guaranteed from the authority of the Head of the Government, of the Foreign Minister and the Place lieutenant of the King in Albania. That would not excessively have diminished the fault of the highest military authorities, for the approval of a offensive plan ambitious in the ends but evidently lacking in the forces in order to go in port, however it would have shown honestly that the responsibilities had more widely to be shared. Then he continued praising the troops, in a marked manner those alpine:

"It is said, to time for that the Italian soldiers in Albania have fought arrogant, it is said, in particular, that the alpine have written glorious and blood pages that would honor any army. When it will be able to be told in its vicissitudes the march of the *Julia* until nearly to Metsova all will appear legendary (...).

The *neutral* ones of every continent, that they make from spectators the bloody collision of the armed masses, must have the modesty kept quite and not to fling reckless and defamatory judgments. The Italian prisoners fallen in the hands of the Greeks are a few thousand and in great part wounded; the Greek successes not exceeded from the tactical and single megalomania field the has largely exaggerated them; the losses are highest (...).

Finally closed announcing triumphal the offensive resumption:

"(...) while before long it will be spring and as the season wants, our season, will come the beautiful one. I say to you that the beautiful one will come and will come in everyone of the four points cardinals (...)" ⁽³²⁾.

The things were not therefore simple. Cavallero had approximately 400,000 men in notes ordering or employment conditions.

According to the data received from the S.I.M. at the end of February, Greece had under arms two classes of levies and fifteen or sixteen of reservists for a total of 550,000 men. Of these, 300,000 were in Albania, 60,000 in Thrace and eastern Macedonian and 40,000 in the inner garrisons.

32) That evening, to the 19:15, the Comandante Superiore telephoned to Mussolini expressing his feelings of participation (Cavallero Diary) and the day after sent a telegram in the name of the troops in Albania.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Italian Forces	Officers	Non-commissioned officers	Troop	Draft Animals	Motor vehicles A	Motor vehicles M
Italians						
Various Arms	13,878	13,770	315,888	45,887	8,613	3,187
CC.NN.	850	938	17,032	1,089	53	49
CC.RR.	305	1,542	9,714	260	378	618
R.G. of Finance	90	388	3,380	419	53	18
Military services	38	81	871	0	32	296
Total	15,161	16,729	346,885	47,655	9,129	4,168
Albanians						
Various Arms	325	389	6,948	188	3	2
CC.NN.	19	44	612	0	0	0
CC.RR.	58	285	2,066	0	0	0
R.G. of Finance	40	91	566	0	0	0
Total	442	809	10,192	188	3	2
Italians	15,161	16,729	346,885	47,655	9,129	4,168
Albanians	442	809	10,192	188	3	2
Grand Total	15,603	17,538	357,077	47,843	9,132	4,170

Of the residual availability of 150,000 men, approximately 50,000 could be considered already to use for replacement of the losses, therefore still 100,000 men remained in regimental depots or framed in divisional reserves. Altogether, carrying out the maximum effort, Greece had mobilized from 23 to 25 divisions, even if those of the reserve were incomplete of men and of material and probably they would have limited themselves to supply units of complements. The classes that could still be mobilized could have supplied others 150,000 men but of rendering doubt, be a matter themselves much of old personnel and, in majority, not trained. On the English aids the data of the S.I.M. were much uncertain. An guarded appraisal - but erroneous -- indicated already as in Greece elements of two divisions, one Canadian and one Australian, and approximately 18,000 men pertaining to aviation, navy a.a. defense; on Crete elements of one division beyond to unit of aviation and navy; in the islands of the Aegean more or less equally. In total there was from attending in the turn of a few days a force of five or six divisions for total

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of 50-60 thousand men, let alone approximately 20,000 various specialists (artillery a.a., services, navy, aviation). In truth, if the appraisal of the Greek possibilities were substantially exact, for those British ones ⁽³³⁾.

Were anticipated the fall of Benghazi, happened on 6 February, naturally cheering up the Government of London, but the issues to resolve in the eastern Mediterranean therefore were confused that the Defense Committee determined on 11 February to send to Cairo the Foreign Minister, Eden, and the Chief of the Imperial G.S. General, Gen. Dill. Churchill perceived at once Gen. Wavell:

"(...) 3) We would have had to please us to create a safe flank for Egypt at Tobruk, and we said that, after that, Greece and/or Turkey must have precedence, but that if you could conquer Benghazi easy (...) so much the better (...) your maximum effort must now consist in helping Greece and/or Turkey. That excludes whichever serious effort against Tripolitania (...). You would have therefore to consolidate your position at Benghazi and to concentrate all the forces available in the Delta, in preparation of the movement towards Europe.

4) Both Greece and Turkey our offer of technical units have up to now refused, asserting that they would be too much meager in order to resolve the main problem, but enough showy in order to provoke the German participation. However, such participation becomes every surer and imminent and can anytime by now have beginning. If Turkey and the Yugoslavia declared to Bulgaria that they will attack it, unless that it does not join them in order to resist the German advance towards the south, this could create such barrier to demand an employment of much greater German forces of those currently available in Rumania. But I fear that they will not make it, the ruinous stupidly the possibility of a common resistance, as it has been made in the case of Belgium and Holland.

5) Our first worry must be now Greece, our ally, than it is being struck therefore well. If Greece will be crushed or forced to conclude a separate peace with Italy, yielding therefore to Germany the strategic positions aerial and naval turn against of we, that will make an ugly effect on Turkey. But if Greece, with the British aid, could contain for some month the German advance, they would turn out some increased the probabilities of a Turkish participation. It appears opportune therefore that we tried of, to put itself in conditions for offering to the Greeks the transfer on their territory of the combatant units of the army that has up to now defended Egypt predisposing all for their transfer and reinforcing them to the maximum of men and materials.

6) We do not know that what will answer Greece to a generous offer

33) However on 21 February Gen. Gandin, head of the I unit of the Comando Supremo, in talks with Gen. v. Rintelen spoke about the presence in Greece only 15,000 British men and 100 airplane (Comando Supremo Diary).

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

of this kind. We do not know which are his means to oppose to a invasion from part of German forces that move from the Bulgarian territory. And reasonable to presume that the Greeks have already a plan in order to withdraw some units from Albania and to carry them to occupy the passes and the lines of defense already prepared along or near the Bulgarian frontier. Sure they will not have taken advantage of the events in Albania without worry of the mortal danger them that it is incumbent on the right and nearly to their rear. If they have a good plan, be worth the pain that we supported it with all our forces and fought the Germans in Greece, hoping with that to make to take part either the Turks or the Yugoslavia. You would have to immediately predispose the plans and the hour tables therefore like all the preliminary movements of ship (...).

10) In the eventuality that is demonstrated impossible to reach whichever effective agreement with the Greeks and to elaborate a militarily applicable plan we must try to save from the shipwreck all that is salvable. We must at all costs hold Crete and occupy all the Greek islands that can serve as air force bases. We could also resume in examination the advance on Tripoli. But these will be solo reward of consolation after that the classic race will have been lost. It will remain always the problem of the aid to Turkey "⁽³⁴⁾

The directives of the Cabinet to minister Eden were also precise and much detailed. In particular, for how much it concerned to Greece specified: "(...) 2. His main objective will be the prompt shipment of reinforcements to Greece. For this purpose it will begin any negotiation that can think necessary with the Commander in Chief of the Middle East, with the Government Egyptian and the Governments of Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey (...)" .

The first news sent from Eden was not such to cheer up Churchill, but the Conference of Cairo reached the conclusion of having to make all the possible in order to bring to the Greeks the maximum aid and in the short time, with good hopes to arrest the German invasion and to prevent the occupation of the peninsula. The only limit was given from the lack of the air forces, than a contemporary participation did not concur with favor of Turkey and that probably it would have rendered unattainable a defense much advanced to cover Salonicco. Wavell, to made accounts, could arrange for the enterprise of one armored brigade and the New Zealand division, with three brigades of infantry, already ready for the boarding; subsequently, in the order, of the Polish brigade, one Australian division, a second armored brigade and a second Australian division, part of the British 6th Inf. Div. in preparation for the invasion to Rhodes (operation *Mandibles*). A first calculation on the transports via sea had indicated requirements at least 53 ships,

34) W. CHURCHILL, op. cit., p. 111, vol. I, pag. 87 and seg.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

problem not a very simple one, considering that these could be scraped together alone withholding those of the convoys that arrived in the Middle East, with all the consequences of the case. The threat of the mines in the Suez Canal arrived moreover, that although, the protective measures in course could be introduced, suspending navigation in the channel for 5-7 days.

The 21st, before leaving for Athens, Eden sent a telegram in which the agreement expressed desire of being able to propose to deploy the British units, to flank of those Greeks, on a defensive position that allowed them to protect Salonicco, but with insufficient hopes of realization for the insufficiency of the air forces. At Athens, Koryzis, new head of the government, awaited the visitors. Already on 8 February he had delivered to the minister of Great Britain a note in which, also repeating the decision to resist to a German aggression, he confirmed that only the income of Germanic troops in Bulgaria would have induced it to allow the disembarkation of English units. In any case, the British government invited to specify the entity of the forces that was disposed to send, in order to estimate the effective influence that these could exercise on the future operations and be regulated consequently. To mid February the political-military situation was introduced to Kryzis in these terms: in Rumania they were found from 25 to 30 German divisions, of which 5 or 6 armored, with an strong aerial contingent, but the increase of troops continued; in Bulgaria they had been adopted preliminary measures for the general mobilization of the army; in Yugoslavia, where they were found under arms approximately 800,000 men, the measure limited to the Romanian - Bulgarian frontier; in eastern Thrace, Turkey maintained a large contingent, but the most recent non-aggression pact with Bulgaria (17 February) did not leave relatively free Ankara from strong worries. From the Greek side there was recording a weakening of the eastern front because of transfer of the 6th Inf. Div. to the Albanian theater, the offensive failure on Tepeleni - Valona and for against the forecast of an imminent Italian offensive. In such circumstances it is comprehensible as the considerations of political character assumed for the Greeks the maximum value, much to wished to introduce their decisions before that English communicated if and what aids could be offered. Therefore King George II, as soon as received Eden, asked to meet himself at once, in private, with Koryzis. The British Foreign minister objected that his presence was connected to closely military reasons, but to the forefront to the insistence of the King ended in order to concur

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to the talk. In that basis (22 February) Koryzis read, and it delivered, a short declaration:

"I wish to repeat in the most categorical way that Greece, from allied faithful, is decided to continue the fight with all its forces until final victory. This decision is not limited to the case of Italy, but eventual German aggression will extend to them.

Greece has only three divisions in Macedonian on the Bulgarian frontier. The pure military problem of knowing the entity rises consequently of reinforcements that they would have to be sent in order to put the Greek army in a position to resisting the Germans.

I wish to still repeat a time that, any is the result and has or some hope does not have Greece to reject the enemy in Macedonian, it will defend its national territory, also if it could only count on its own forces "⁽³⁵⁾.

The conference was begun with the exposure of the English point of view. Eden said that, in short, it was dealt to decide of common agreement the measures to take in order to face the German danger and specified that naturally the British expeditionary corps, of which it supplied the data details, would have been placed to the orders of the Greek supreme commander. Koryzis renewed just the thought on the British aid, emphasizing the fear to bring down the German invasion and asking which it would have been, to English warning, the line of conduct Yugoslavia and Turk. Eden was aware of how much weight could have the political attitude of Belgrade on the decisions to take, therefore already 15 February from Gibraltar, during the travel towards Egypt, had sent a message to the Regent proposing an encounter in southern Serbia. Prince Paul, than the previous day it had been received by Hitler at the Obersalzberg, declined the invite for fear committing a false step in the comparisons of the Germany. The retort of Eden was therefore much simple one: it did not know that what to answer, but after the conversations in course he would have went to Ankara, where it would have explained the Turkish representatives who the decision to help Greece meant the impossibility to help Turkey. *"It was important - he asserted - that we and Greece independently took our decisions from the attitude of Turkey and the Yugoslavia, because if we had waited for of knowing as they meant to behave itself he would have been then too much late in order to organize an effective resistance to a German attack"*⁽³⁶⁾.

35) W. CHURCHILL, op. cit., p. III, vol. I, page 98.

36) A. EDEN, Memories, Garzanti, Milan 1968, page. 271.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

After the plenary sitting the military heads gathered to part in order to discuss on the operating possibilities. According to the report made by Eden, Gen. Papagos specified that he:

"(...) comprised the extreme importance of the factor time that rendered impossible to wait for Yugoslavia and Turkey to clarify their attitude. Therefore he had asked his Government to give authority him to begin withdrawing ⁽³⁷⁾ as soon as possible and, in any case, before that a German initiative gave to the withdraw the appearance of a pull back. It could be made so that this measure seemed understanding to strengthen the Albanian front (...). In order to withdraw the troops from Thrace and from Macedonia in three weeks would be intentional. Once carried to completion the withdraw, the Greeks would have deploy on the line of the Aliakmon 35 battalions, plus one motorized division at Larissa and perhaps also another draft from the reserves. It would have been then possible to arrest the right wing of the operating forces in Albania (...). If that same evening Yugoslavia had said that it was ready to fight, the Greeks would be remained on the line of the Nestos and would have asked the disembarkation for British forces at Salonicco and Kavala (...). If he had decided himself to withdraw (...) would be passes twenty days before that the Germans, last the frontier, were in a position to investing the line of the Aliakmon with sufficient forces. It was a line of natural defense much strongly and the Greek 35 battalions with the troops offered from Great Britain would have been in a position of holding it (...) "⁽³⁸⁾.

Finally, in the conclusive meeting, Papagos resumed the podium, convene that:

"(...) given the doubt attitude of the Yugoslavia and the Turks is not possible to count of being able to defend a line that covers Salonicco and the only solid line, holding account of the circumstance, is that one of the Aliakmon";

then he continued, evidencing the importance of the attitude Yugoslav, from which the choice of the defensive position depended. If the Yugoslavia were to take part to side of the Allies, it was necessary to defend Salonicco at all costs, main base of his supplies from foreign country, and consequently the defensive position had to be characterized in the positions fortified from Beles to the mouth of the Nestos. If instead it were remained neutral "not allowing the passage of German troops, it did not appear opportune to defend the eastern Macedonian and western Thrace, given the lack of troops available. It had therefore to leave only the garrisons of the permanent fortifications, to lead delay and wearing down combats in order to earn time to

37) He referred to the troops of campaign located in western Thrace and in eastern Macedonian.

38) A. EDEN, op. cit., page. 272.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

favor of the regression of divisions therefore deployed on the Kaimaktsalan - Vermir line (or line of the Aliakmon), where had been reached by the British units. This solution, that it demanded prejudicial at least a score of days for the abandonment of the eastern regions and the garrison of the P.D., was painful to take since involved the evacuation without fight of a remarkable part of national territory. Therefore it was necessary to clear the attitude of Yugoslavia, and, in any case, it was opportune to put Belgrade to the current of the decisions reached.

The English supported, instead, the convenience to proceed immediately to the withdraw in issue *"on the line that the circumstances would have imposed to us in the eventuality of a lacked participation the Yugoslavia to our flank"* ⁽³⁹⁾. Finally Eden informed the Greek representatives whom person in charge would have endured the minister Campbell in Belgrade to communicate to Regent that a German attack on Salonico seemed sure by now and that urged to know which position would have chosen his government. The answer Yugoslavia was delivered to Ankara the 27th: it was limited to admit that the government of Belgrade was not in conditions of being able to take position and asked not to insist because it made it.

A misunderstanding was being born that had to subject to hard tries the alliance. On 24 February, in fact, Eden put Churchill to the current of results achieved in these terms:

"An agreement has been reached today on all the points with the Greek Government. When, to the term of the arguments, I ask if the Greek Government would have appreciate the arrival in Greece of British troops in the entity and to the conditions by us proposed, the Prime Minister declared formally that the Greek government accepted our offer with gratefulness and approved of all the particular agreements concluded between the two General Staffs (...)" ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Soon after Eden, with Gen. Dill and Wavell, left for Ankara, where it appeared clearly that the Turks did not have any desire to anticipate the times: if assaulted from the Germany they would be naturally defenses to the end, but until to that moment they were not felt in a position to entering in war because much too weak and because the limited aid of Great Britain could not have great weight in the fight. Churchill

³⁹⁾ A. EDEN, op. cit., page. 274. The phrase is not very clear. Eden asserts in his Memories that "neither then of as a result of the British representatives came the suspicion that the line to hold at all costs was not that one of the Aliakmon".

⁴⁰⁾ W. CHURCHILL, op. cit., p. 111, vol. I, page. 98 and following.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

took action of the answer, however discounted, and decided to press strongly more on the Yugoslavia: "*an unexpected movement towards south from Yugoslavian side - he wrote to Eden - would provoke an Italian disaster of great proportions, perhaps decisive for the entire Balkan situation (...)*". But that same day, 10 March, took place waited for and feared *casus belli*: to the morning of the 6th German troops entered in Bulgaria, whose army gave beginning to the mobilization and the assembled one along the borders with Greece and Yugoslavia, while Germanic aviation was moved to the Bulgarian airports. At the same time, Minister Campbell went to Athens and informed Eden that all more existed the *eventuality* that the Yugoslavia, putting to the current of the proposed British to take the side in Greece, *could be disposed to collaborate*. He was undoubtedly too much little.

The same evening (2 March) the President Koryzis and Gen. Papagos was met in the British embassy with the English representatives in a talk that was carried out in a climate of mutual disappointment. Eden, which he had been already put to the current by Gen. Heywood, of connection with the General Staff Greek, than nothing had been made in function of the resistance to oppose to the Germans with the British expeditionary Corps, began expressing the conviction that Turkey would be remained in all probability neutral and then he asked if the withdraw of the divisions from Bulgarian frontier to the line of the Aliakmon were already in course. Gen. Papagos beats again that the provision had not been adopted because although his solicitations, had not received some answer from the English embassy to Belgrade approximately the role that would have exercised the Yugoslavia, element that had formally declared to be determining to the ends of the decisions to take. Edens and Dill then asked to give the executive order immediately, but Papagos opposed a refusal: to the Germans a week was enough by now in order to assume the offensive alignment to the frontier Bulgarian-Greek, while the transfer of the divisions demanded approximately three weeks. What it would have been possible to realize before - if English had taken care themselves test the Yugoslav intentions timely - in a reasonable picture of relative emergency, now it became too much hazardous, existing the risk to be surprises from the enemy offensive in full retrograde movement. For more, he added Gen. Papagos, the position Yugoslavia was anything but that acquired and a withdraw that had involved the abandonment of the Macedonian and Salonicco would have every compromise effort to attract the Yugoslavia from the Allied side.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

After all, he asked that the British reinforcements be sent to the fortified line of the Macedonian frontier, where the Greek forces would have accepted battle ⁽⁴¹⁾. The meeting was dissolved without some decision and in a rather cold atmosphere.

On 4 March had place the last meeting, with the participation also of King George II. Eden reported to London in detail:

"To our arrival we have found a changed and embarrassing situation and an atmosphere of all the different from that one of our last visit (...). [Papagos here] has proposed to send the British troops on the Macedonian frontier as disembark, even if is improbable that they can arrive to us in time. We naturally have rejected this proposal that at the time to fists with the conditions that we had looked on to for the shipment of our forces. We have telephoned to Wavell to come to Athens in order to participate to the talks (...). Since the attitude of Papagos was rigid and resigned at the same time, we have had to make appeal to the King which, for all, duration of the arguments that are continuations, has maintained himself calm, resolute and comprehensive.

After an hour of he pulls and motivating force that in sure moments resemble painfully to quibble like an eastern bazaar merchant, the Greeks have finally consented to assign to the defense of the line of the Aliakmon, until to the arrival of the British troops, the following units: three coming from divisions (the 12th from Macedonia, the 20th coming from Florina and a motorized division of recent formation) and moreover some battalions transferred from western Thrace, admitted that Turkey is declared disposed to replace them and that they arrive in time.

We have therefore forwarded the following alternatives:

a) to receive the plan on which Papagos has continued to insist also after our objections, and that is to try to make to flow our forces in a little to the time until to the Macedonian frontier;

b) to accept the three divisions offered from the Greeks for the line of the Aliakmon, equivalents to a number of battalions between the 16 and the 23, instead of the 35 on which we had hoped after the previous visit to Athens, and to concentrate also our forces on this line (...);

c) to withdraw our offer of military support.

We have all summoned that solution *a* can only carry to a general collapse, while solution *c* appears equally disastrous because it would determine unavoidably the fast liquidation of Greece and because the abandonment of Greece from our part would have negative repercussions in all the Neighbor and Middle East (...). Not without apprehension therefore has opted for the solution *b*, but on condition that the direction and the organization of the entire line of the Aliakmon come entrusted to Gen. Wilson not hardly these will be in a position to assuming command. The Greek delegates have accepted this condition (...).

The more depressing aspect of the situation is the attitude of Papagos,

41) A. PAPAGOS, op. cit., page. 125.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

which, remained lacking in the guide of Metaxas, he seems he has lost every confidence.

Nevertheless, in the conclusive talk, the decisions by now taken, he has seemed to me surer (...) "⁽⁴²⁾

In London this letter produced an absolutely unfavorable impression and induced the chiefs of general staff to emphasize the denied aspects that now it introduced an participation in Greece: the moral depression of the Greek commander in chief both for the German danger and for the Albanian situation, the lacked implementation the engagements assumed approximately the withdraw of the troops on the line of the Aliakmon, the smaller availability of Greek forces in order to hold such position. Beyond, then, to all the notes difficulty from British side, were also to consider the factor of time: according to their calculations the Germans could introduce in front of the line of the Aliakmon before 15 March two divisions and on the 22nd another three. Since it was not hopeful that the Greeks could more withhold the adversary on the P.D. more than some days, in the best one of the hypotheses he could himself be thought to only oppose two brigades (one armored and one of New Zealand infantry) to the first two Germanic divisions. The first impulse of Churchill was to leave to lose Greece, being previewed sweeping, such German advance to exceed great part of the English worries; as well as, both his minister in Athens, Sir Palaiet, and Eden and the military heads in Cairo, examined once again the problem under all the aspects, expressed themselves unanimity for the confirmation of the decision taken to Athens, "*although the heavy engagements and the serious risks that undoubtedly are connected to them*". Churchill very appreciated the firmness and the thought of the answer, but asked a circumstantial military relation, inasmuch as "*since here, you have supplied us a few facts or your reason motivated as such to justify to the eyes of the Dominions the outwards operation of noblesse oblige*"⁽⁴³⁾. Received the relation, he immediately subjected the issue to the examination of the War Cabinet. On 7 March telegraphed to Eden that "*the Cabinet has decided to authorize to proceed with the operation, and therefore making the Cabinet it assumes itself completes responsibility*". In any case some days after he thought well to inform Roosevelt, asking practical American collaboration:

"(...) In this conjuncture the participation of the Yugoslavia is decisive. No country has ever had a similar military occasion. If they will attack the Italians to the rear in Albania, nobody can estimate what could happen

42) A. EDEN, op. cit., page 283. Cfr. To PAPAGOS, op. cit., page 126-127.

43) W. CHURCHILL, op. cit., p. In, vol. I, page 129.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

in the turn of a few weeks. The entire situation could be turned over and also the attitude of the Turkey decided to our favor. The impression is had that Russia, although guided mainly from the fear, could at least give some assurance to Turkey not to attack it in the Caucasus or the Black Sea. I hardly have need to say that the concerted action of your ambassadors in Turkey, Russia and above all in Yugoslavia, would be in this moment of enormous importance and could perhaps make indeed to hang the balance from our part"⁽⁴⁴⁾.

In short first of March, when the German troops were gotten ready to put into effect operation *Marita*, the Greek army was almost impotent on the Macedonian front and already had exceeded the top dead center on that Albanian. The strategic directive "*nearly all against Italy, nearly non against Germany*" had been observed until to late with the hope throwing to sea the Italian forces, but the hope had been demonstrated illusory. And, worse still, the units that were struck in Albania therefore were worn away from not more being able to be employed elsewhere.

44) W. CHURCHILL, op. cit., p. III, vol. I, pag. 135.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

CHAPTER XI

THE ITALIAN COUNTER-OFFENSIVE IN THE DESHNICËS VALLEY
(March 1941)

1. THE PREPARATION.

Since from 16 November the retaking of the initiative in order to arrive at victory with a decisive battle delivered with adequate forces had been the goal which the Comando Superiore had always aimed. Until the end of December 1940 it had not been possible to think to other if not to the pure and simple defense: too much was the superiority of the enemy, chaotic the arrival from Italy of reinforcements and material, very insufficient the artilleries of medium-caliber and to long throw, deficient the services, almost null the possibilities of aviation to favor of the troops engaged in Albania. In February, as previously it has been pointed out, the situation was introduced very different. The Commanders of the Army could effectively exercise their action and make to feel their operating will because finally they had reserves, even if composed from unit in reorganization. The deployment of the artilleries, than to the beginning was constituted from only the divisional groups, nearly always arrived in delay regarding the infantries, and from a small pieces parts of army corps, began with advancing themselves of February to being upgraded in important measure: batteries of guns from 149 and 152 arrived from Italy and some made to feel its voice in the battle of Tepeleni. They had all the defects of the antiquated model, the slow shooting, the limited throw regarding the modern material and very good in possession of the Greeks; but the number, that it had to end in order to turn out remarkably advanced to that one of the adversary, and an elastic employment would be resolutions to compensate, at least in part, the deficiency of quality. Moreover it was given for sure, in the counter-offensive that would have been engaged in March, the support in great style of aviation. This, widely engaged in N.A., had not been able

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

until then giving that competition on which it had been made much confidence and that a lot was wished, but in February its possibilities in the Albanian theater for the near future appeared much better. The promises of the Comando Supremo and the assurances of the Gen. Pricolo, present to Tirana for some weeks, gave for sure the employment also of dive bombers. The more sensitive improvement had happened in the field of the street organization. At the end of February every army corps had a road that served it, good capacity, and in good conditions; for the VIII Corps, supplied from Berat, it had been necessary to construct *ex novo* a long roadway feature, in order to avoid the steep slopes where the old full load tracing was climbing with slopes from mule tracks not useable by trucks, to the point that in order to assure the feeding of the army corps during the month of January had been necessary to implant a cableway for the transport of part of the materials and to strongly establish on the distance slope a servicing, where the men, by hand, helped the motor vehicles to exceed the excessive steep points.

On 11 February, considered the existing pause on the front of the entire 11th Army, Cavallero had telegraphed to Geloso formulating three hypotheses on the Greek intentions: a reiteration of the effort against IV and VIII Corps towards Berat, the assumption of a defensive attitude, the movement of forces for a new attempt in other fields. In any case, to part the necessity to acquire elements in order to characterize the line of conduct chosen by the enemy, premised to our future action remained retaking of the positions of hill 1308 of the Trebeshines and Chiaf Lusit, whose possession appeared indispensable in order to advance along the Deshnicës valley on Klisura. In purpose: "*to very soon transmit to me the relative operations plan* ", concluded Cavallero. Look for a precise reason for similar demand. Some day before, and just the evening of the 8th, Gen. Gambarà had directly addressed, referring to previous oral contacts, and had expressed the own negative convictions in purpose, suggesting instead an attack on a more wide breath:

"Excellence,
pardoned the freedom, the insistence. Of the rest I know that my eagerness is Yours: therefore, I dare. His Exc. Jacomoni will have spoken to You. I add: - the army corps is reduced... to one reduced division; - every day that passes represents one force lessening; - the enemy is uniting forces and seems assessed has all the good intentions to deliver a decisive attack in direction of Berat;

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

- the *Pinerolo*, as until today it has resisted, will still resist... but since a human what has a limit, therefore it will happen that, wanting or unwilling, a beautiful moment the *Cagliari* will end for being absorbed from the defense;

- that, inelucatably, will carry to a new strained delay to how much is to heart: to the offensive. And it will be a trouble. Excellence, as from Your desire I have examined the possibilities in order to occupy Ciafa Lusit and hill 1308 of the Trebeshines. To my modest warning, the expense would not be compensated from the cost. That in relation to the little forces that I have, the land and its difficulty in order to cover it, to the numerous enemy forces that occupy such positions.

Lusit and hill 1308 they will *loro sponte* if VIII Corps will have the force in order to dare, heading for low head, for the suspected directed way more and therefore less from the enemy, at Klisura.

They have been among the troops; I have felt their general opinions, of the colonels, my General Staff: *una la volontà*, serious, firm, decided: advance.

Yours VIII Corps not only feels in if the force to dare; but it has firm confidence to succeed and it is what counts. I do not ask that to the *Cagliari* and the *Julia*, beyond to some unit of the IV Corps that borders us to the left, and all those pieces of artillery of whichever type and nature that will be able to scrape together.

The *Stena* is in via of complete substitution. Before tomorrow it will be all re-united behind. If it succeeds to me to punch - what of which I do not doubt, because in small field it will be made mass - we will carry between the large enemy who is gathering such a confusion... that victory will be Yours. And if, in the most damned of the hypotheses, it were not succeeded (it is impossible) will be always a victory the same one, because we will impose such losses and such jitters to the enemy, from get at least sending back the offensive planned for a month.

But the ideal moment is this Excellence! For the spirit of the troops, for the time that are being put to the beautiful one and for all those other considerations that You, better than me, know. I have already begun to collect ammunitions, provisions, materials of the engineers. I have predisposed for new emplacements of artillery and studied how much it is necessary in organizational matter, in order not to leave the case, to the unexpected, than the possible minimum of probability.

Slowly simplest: with the troops in place to engage, attacking, the enemy to the flanks - to surprise it to the center, with one preparation never seen and attack to mass and depth of fresh troops, directed to the points of departure of the ways of supply for his wings. And then, Excellence... from something is born something!

Pardoned if I have exposed badly and in a hurry... In depth, I have not made in these two or three days, than to continue in my head the speech from You begun to... (?)... *on the attacks for the depth and height(...)*⁽¹⁾

Evidently was be a matter of an idea revealed with active enthusiasm, but that it had to be very deepened. For the moment Cavallero remained doubtful and made to ask "from General Geloso took care of appraisal for the hypothesis for counterattack on hill 1308 and on Chiaf

1) Cavallero Diary. Dated 8.2.1941,

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Lusit, let alone of the entity of the forces with which the VIII Corps could participate, Gen. Gambará cleared just the thought. The enemy, according to the information, had two battalions on the eastern slopes of the Trebeshines, towards Chiaf Lusit, and one towards Bali; 4th and 5th infantry on the ridge of the chain. Held account of the presumed force of these last regiments, the availability from Greek part could be considered of 6-7 battalions. In the turn of twenty-four hours from Hani Balaban could flow in zone still two battalions of the 28th infantry, but it was not difficult to withhold them in depth and to recall them towards threatening north with a demonstrative action the high valley of the Deshnicës, and others two units - III/14th and 2nd (?) infantry - deployed on the crest of the Trebeshines, in the central and southern features of the chain, even if improbable that they were dissuaded from their task of garrison of the positions of the Mali Trebeshines until Mt. Groppa. That premising, the maneuver design could diminish the attack in direction north-south the positions of hill 1308 and Chiaf Lusit, exercising one smaller effort from the Arze against the summit of the Trebeshines, and carry out demanded action on the ridge of Bregu Shalesit. Considering the possible tactical ways and the opposing alignment, they were estimates necessary six battalions (is not worth to say less one division) for the attack from north towards south and than three battalions with a group of artillery for the action of the Arze.

Leaving from the presupposed of having a re-united organic division to Berat, the offensive could be delivered after five days from the beginning of the movement of major unit. Now, for the action in argument it was not evidently possible to make assignment on the *Pinerolo*, hardly sufficient the maintenance of the defensive position, since had endured a reduction nearly 40% in the infantry units. Of other part it was most important that in that moment of resumption the soldier had the feeling of a clean superiority on the adversary, than only could turn out through actions that they gave the maximum of resolution probability. And Gambará returned to its proposal begins them: the fall of the Mali Trebeshines could be obtained consequently indirectly of an attack conducted on the left, along the bottom of the Deshnicës valley, and on the line of the Mali; attack that, coming down on the Vojussa to mount of Klisura, beyond guaranteeing the outlet in the valley would have lead to the encirclement of the Greek units located on the Trebeshines, with a remarkable economy of the forces in the general picture of the offensive resumption.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"In synthesis - Gen Gambara concluded - to my subordinated warning:

- a) I do not think that the eventual resolution of the action [on the Trebeshines] compensations the necessary expense to the same resolution;
- b) I already confirm as much as said by voice to his Exc. Geloso, Lusit and Trebeshines will fall for maneuver an offensive were decided on Klisura and beyond (...)"⁽²⁾.

Of this Gambara plan it had endured occasion to speak in the early afternoon about 13:00 with the Comandante Superiore at Rehova. Cavallero pointed out to the general course of the operations and to his intention to act soon in order to retake Klisura and eventually to push himself on the Premeti, employing above all the VIII and XXV army corps:

"Gambara says that Ciafa Lusit he can take it when he wants - Cavallero in his diary wrote - but it could not conserve it for the enemy shooting. To clarification of how much said before I inform that the *Sforzesca* plus other division would attack frontally and if it is necessary I can put to its disposition one other division. But it is necessary that it previews the necessity of the supply. I inform that for the alignment of the *Julia* [that had to act on Klisura through the Trebeshines] the land is prepared because has acted the *Legnano*. With regard to hill 1308, he says that he does not want to attack. It would cost too many losses with the maneuver. He can make to fall from the height with the *Bolzano* Bn., but then it would be difficult to hold it. Better to wait on the large action. Will create a surprise attack on Monastero. It recognizes that 15 days of wait are too many. However neither the *Julia* or the others are ready.

Returning to the action of which he is dealing with, I say to it that the only thing that can be made it is a whirlpool towards north and then to attack of below. But I do not mean with this to break the action. Therefore precedence, yes, but of a day or 48 hours to the maximum. Something must be done, but not wear away the troops (...). However the *Julia* will be able to move the 25th; it will employ three or four days then in order to complete the Tepeleni – Dragoti - Mezgorani way. I insist on the part that will have the VIII C.A. in the action, on the divisions that flow in (4 or 5) and on the consequent logistic foresight".

After all, the concept on which they were found of agreement Cavallero and Geloso was to attack along the operating director of the Deshnicës valley being exercised a frontal effort, regarding the opposing alignment, from the head of the water course and a lateral of the Shendeli and from the Arze. Particular importance came conferred to this last one, because the speed could aloe the retaking of the Trebeshines. To such Geloso goal it was reserved to assign to the XXV Corps the *Julia*, that it was being reordered in second formation and that, capacity to the force

2) DS Commando VIII army corps, f. 1/1147 date 13.2.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of eight battalions, it had to develop the action for Chiaf Mezgoranit.

But Gen. Gambara renounced his as own idea and the 20th did not return the burden directly with Cavallero:

"(...) *All today* I have still thought next to the thing - putting first of all to me for and all against - waves to assess to me that the answers given were not the fruit of preconceived ideas.

Not, Excellency. They are remained of same the precise, unchanged warning. And if I allow myself to repeat to you this for enrolled is for giving You that you must decide, the clean, specifies feeling that the answer is fruit of mature and very founded reflection. I do not see in absolute way some possibility of offensive action *of neither in the field of the Arze nor on north crest of the Trebeshines*. (...).

Excellency, how much over is that that dispassionately, conscientiously task on demanded how much. And already that there are, you still allow a small and short word... on my obsession. More than my gaze and more my taste this is my field and more I convince... *that it represents the love of the fields* in order to make how much you want.

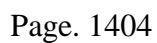
And more the enemy will join forces and he will upset against the unattainable Tepeleni and more it will make Your game, if the movement of the victorious collected one will leave from here. Closed between the Vojussa- Trebeshines-Shendeli, *stumped in the breath* once that we will be at Bali to east of Klisura, *wrapped to the northeast* with the occupation of the line of the Mali (than they will be converted in... assets.)... what will be able more to make, if not to run off the rails?

And continuing then towards south-east... it will badly begin to be also the alignment that faces the 9th Army!...

Here, Excellency, we have not been in leisure. Being worth my G.S. has worked and works to everyone for the logistic preparation - artilleries - connections - repairs, etc etc... and all, I can guarantee to You, is to good point... like the *enthusiasm*, the *unquestioned faith in success* (...). I add a small look on to of principle for give the tangible test to you that all has been studied (...) "⁽³⁾.

In short, Gen. Gambara, as it exposed in the particular to Gen. Geloso, meant to deliver to a *decisive* offensive in the field comprised between Arza di Mezzo and Bregu Gliulei (sketch n. 94). In his study, the commander of the VIII Corps had found itself, in order to determine the breach feature, to having to resolve the usual dilemma of the war in mountain: attack for the high or the bottom. Some considerations had induced it to choose this last solution: the difficulties of a long action the ridge of the Trebeshines, already tried in the unfruitful attempts to retake hill. 1308; the slowness with which an attack along the ridge of the Mali would have progressed, when also the field of the VIII Corps had been extended to such ridge; the conviction that,

3) Cavallero diary, date 20.2.1941.



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

a route the position of opposing resistance, only astride of the Deshnicës would have been possible to advance quickly, therefore to block the Klisura to enemy troops withdrawing from the Trebeshines and to the bridge on the Lomniça those withdrawing from the Mali. In other words, only the successive breach and advancing for the valley bottom them could transform tactical initial success into a strategic success, carrying that is to the elimination of some Greek major unit from the fight. The attack for the bottom is unadvisable when the bottom is in subjection of the high. But in the case in issue the subjection could not only be of reactions of movement - from the ridge of the Mali and from those of the Trebeshines it was necessary in practical a day because consisting units could come down in the valley bottom - but of fire reactions. To avoid them it could be supplied: for the Mali, initially with a formal action and then with a flanking action; for the Trebeshines, with the neutralization of offense sources (artillery and mortars) to realize by means of counter-battery and the aerial bombing. After all, characterized the better director for the strategic exploitation, it had been searched the breach in correspondence of it.

Since Gambara estimated necessary to continue the flanking on the Mali, in how much an action in Deshnicës valley could not have anything to do with its eastern flank, and since the progression on the long chain had to be coordinated closely with the advance in the valley by means of only a single command, it considered of having to the own dependencies the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* and a mountain division - possibly the *Julia*, or at least another Inf. Div. reinforced from a alpine regiment - than more better concurred than to develop the maneuver for the height. With six divisions, it was proposed to reach the deep objective of C.A., Qarishta and Fratarit- Bridge on the Lomniça, fixing the enemy to the wings with the fire of artillery and aviation on the Trebeshines and with the *Cacciatori* at Bregu Gliulei, and breaking off the Greek front astride of the roadway with the *Julia* (objective Mali Nishites), the *Puglie* (objective Pavari) and the *Pinerolo* (objective Bali). Subsequently it would have headed more for possible bottom, in order to cut to the base the umbilical cord of the operating troops at the Trebeshines - Shendeli and to turn the opposing forces located in the Deshnicës valley and to the head of the Mali with the divisions in the 2nd formation: *Cacciatori*, proceeding along the Mali behind the *Julia*, with objective Qarishta and Fratarit; *Cagliari* behind the *Puglie*, with objective the bridge on the Lomniça; *Bari* on the right, behind the *Pinerolo*, with objective the Castle of Klisura.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

To completion of the plan, Gen. Gambarà asked, in logistic field, the making good the deficiencies of unit, organs of - services, means of transport and materials still lacking to the army corps⁽⁴⁾ and the reinforcements adapted in personnel of the engineers for the indispensable street work. As far as the supplies to amass in order to make headway to the presumable requirements of the first three days of combat, he signaled being necessary in order to catch up the 5 unfoc for all arms, 3 consumptions of daily rations, approximately 60 tons of fuel and adapted clothing. The plan was decidedly ambitious and presupposed one pushed a strong offensive or a static very fragile defense, but it was not any in one in the other case. Then there was the issue of the mountain division, on which Cavallero did not have some intention to let go. And then there was the gravity of this army corps.

Having nothing to do with the many perplexities connected with the employment of a army corps with six divisions and adapted troops with support, every argument on the use of the *Julia* fell the 21st: the Greek pressure on Tepeleni was very strong and the risk could not be run, than in some moment it aroused worry, of a setback that it would have had most serious moral and material repercussions. Therefore, as it has been looked at, the *Julia* had to be deployed between the Shendeli and the Golico. Geloso ask to obtain from the 9th Army another mountain division, changing it eventually with one of infantry, but the Comandante Superiore did not concur. To the point in which the things were found, the offensive, when also had brought back initial success, ran the risk not to be able to continue without being forced to supply, with same means of the VIII C.A., to the elimination or at least to the neutralization of the enemy forces on the Trebeshines. Of other part a dismissal did not seem more conceivable for two different series of considerations. First of all the Greek insistence for Tepeleni it was such that it could have forced to employ for the defense, as was already happened for the *Julia*, major destined unit to feeding the offensive battle; plus, the operation only lead from the IV and from the VIII Corps, even if had not achieved tactical results of such relief from being able to be takes advantage of it in depth, would also always have caught up the scope to arrange to the enemy a serious blow in the direction

4) The directory of the materials of the transmissions demands urgently is illuminant approximately the level of inconstancy which they were come down the availabilities of the units, in a picture of equipments already of for himself extremely lean in order not saying poor, as an example: 50 telephone exchanges, 100 visual stations, 92 radio stations of varied type, ect.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

very dangerous, forcing it to desist from the effort on Tepeleni or at least to affect the units that supported it. In the second place, a reason of political order spurred not to delay further: it was great interest of Italy to tighten the times and to try to reach the discouragement of the Greek resistance with its own forces; the cooperation of the German, much better organized troops and Armies, would have removed undoubtedly to the Italy, whose prestige had been already reduced from the unfortunate campaign, every merit of the victory. Every effort had to be made therefore if in order not to reach the annihilation of the Greek army, at least for inflict such a blow to render the prosecution of the fight pure formal. For these reasons the promptest performance of the offensive from part of the 11th Army was decided, with the goal limited to raise the XXV Corps from the nagging and the dangerous pressure which it was subject. The outcome of the battle would have advised if to proceed of course before, or if instead to make an further pause in order to not still perfectly improve the preparation to point.

The 21st Cavallero realized his decisions in the directives n. 18⁽⁵⁾: the counter maneuver previewed with directives n. 16 for the region of the Arze were exceeded from the events; in his instead of the offensive resumption had to leave from the front of Berat breaking off, previous mighty fire preparation, the enemy device astride of the roadway of the Deshnicës vallyay with first objective the zone of Suka - from which developing further, in favorable case, the penetration on Klisura or the Qarishta and Fratarit -; engaging the Greek forces of the lateral fields and in particular neutralizing the strong point of hill 1308; previewing the eventuality of a competition from the Vojussa valley (area of Tepeleni). In relation to this address, on 24 February, while the first phase of the battle of Tepeleni was being extinguished, Gen. Geloso circulated the base order. The breach of the forehead came entrusted to the VIII Corps, that with four divisions it had to reach Suka and possibly Klisura; the protection of the left flank was assigned to the two divisions of the IV Corps, with Chiaf and Murit as objective of attack and Chiaf and Sofiut as eventual objective; the protection of the right flank had to be offered from the XXV Corps with a strongly action of coupling exercised by the *Sforzesca*. The *Julia* would be ready kept to take part in order to take advantage of the success astride of the Vojussa, not just the VIII Corps had developed in depth its push

5) DSCSFAA, f. 02421/op. dated 21.2.1941.

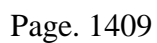
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

on Klisura. But Cavallero was not very convinced to obtain all for effect of the action of the VIII Corps and the 25th asked to Geloso to carefully consider the opportunity that the previewed concomitant effort from the Shendeli came fed with all the forces available, stretching to the "smashing" of the Greek units in those drawn, without to attend effects of turn out from the main attack on Klisura. An adaptation of the order of the 11th Army derived some: the XXV Corps, detention remaining the task to guarantee the pillars of the eastern defense of Tepeleni, had to attack, in at the same times with the VIII Corps, objective Arza di Sopra-Chiaf Mezgoranit in order determining the annihilation of the enemy forces located between the Shendeli and the Trebeshines (sketch 95).

The plan went being completed for successive approximations: 10 March Cavallero follow up the directives n. 18 with directives n. 20⁽⁶⁾, communicating that to the 11th Army they were assigned, beyond to the units in place, the Inf. Divs *Puglie*, *Bari* and *Siena* and, just arrived in Albania, six groups of medium and heavy field artillery and specifying that "*breaking of the enemy front will have to be proceeded without pause to the exploitation, locking the adversary and preventing them to knit together a new alignments*". The infantry forces were considered sufficient; after to have given to the army corps the units thought necessary they remained a reserve of the Army: *Siena* and *Legnano* Inf. Div.; and a reserve of the Comando Superiore: *Centauro*. Arm. Div.

Under the logistic aspect the Field army quartermaster corps had reached a satisfactory level of rendering, in a position to making headway also to the deficiencies of the units coming from the mother land, which, also arriving in much better conditions than how much did not happen in the first months, to the action of the disembarkation was also always incomplete of services. Further deficiencies were remaining in the field of the artilleries. Cavallero, in his duty as Chief of the G.S. General, had given to order to the G.S. of the Army to make to flow groups of heavy field and heavy for the imminent battle, it is worth to say before the end of February. The 25th of the same month, instead, the G.S. of the Army communicated that the artilleries to long throw, that is those of which mainly necessity for the counter-battery was perceived, they were not still ready and they would not probably have arrived before 10 March. Also in ammunition fact incompleteness existed. The General Staff had had to reduce the amounts demanded because in Italy the ammunitions

6) DSCSFAA, f. dated D.2750/op. 1.3.1941.



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

was lacking. How much was necessary in Albania in order to act in depth against Greece had to derive from regimental depots, that it meant that the shipment of an unit of fire to the armies operating overseas happened collecting here and there of small ammunition shares. To the constitutional deficiencies of our organization the state of the sea arrived, that between the end of February and first of March it was truly very bad; such to sometimes render traverse and difficult and the always much laborious drainage impossible in the roadstead of Valona. It achieved from all that that the preparation for the planned offensive, is pure to limited objective, at the end of February was not still to point.

In relation to the orders of the Commander of the army, the three army corps adjusted to the work. The IV Corps, most northern, from a month found in one situation of static defense not a lot hindered by the enemy. To part a most intense activity of patrols in order to above all recognize with the Greek the greater possible precision the defense - with he turns out an excellent objective - and a large job of reordering, the problems to resolve was two: the cancellation of the small bag of bottom of the Osum valley from part of the *Pusteria* and to retake Bregu Gliulei-Mali Spadarit from part of the *Cacciatori*. For the first operation another mountain battalion was necessary to await the arrival at least, in how much with the cession of the *Val Chiese* the *Pusteria* was remained with three single battalions (one of which in course of amalgamate with the complements of just introduced units), while the minimal employment of two Bns. for the attack and two Bns. for the garrison of the positions of departure was necessary, with special care on the credit side left wing (Teqe). For the second one, by far more important because by now to place itself in the picture of the widest offensive in Deshnicës valley, in the thought of the commander of the IV Corps had come getting rid the development of the action: the objective to catch up and to conquer to more soon was the Spadarit, with direction of attack from the north towards the south. That fact, the effort on Bregu Gliulei-Q. Murit would have turned out facilitated from a direct means competition and a indirect maneuver.

But, it is necessary to say, it does not seem existed excessive identity of views between the commander of the army corps and the subordinate commanders: nearly all the letters written by Gen. Mercalli is with regard to meaningful. Towards the end of February these expressed still more clearly:

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

"(...) But what more counts and our energies and our efforts and multiply us ten fold will assure us the victory we are will to fight and to win... at all costs.

Now you ask: this will exists in all and exists above all in the pictures in such measure from being able itself to expand indeed to burst in that one of the own followers, therefore to constitute this only formidable block what is necessary in order to win? I ask it because it reaches me, daily, some voice that could make some to doubt me (...).

There is still the conviction (and noticed in increasing amount to measure that knows them in the degrees) that the means to disposition in order to leave to the yearned for collected, are not sufficient, meant well in relation to those of the enemy and to the value of the same enemy who faces to us (...)" ⁽⁷⁾.

Where it turns out difficult to find persuasive force is in the comparison between the opposite alignments. According to the same Commander of the army corps, it was dealt to move with 14 battalions against 10 Greeks and 96 pieces against 43, therefore a ratio of 1.4 to 1 for the infantry and little more than 2 to 1 for the artillery. In truth, of the 14 battalions, at least two of the *Pusteria* had to remain on the position of resistance for the anchorage to the Tomori. All adding, the ratio of the forces was such to justify more than a doubt, especially for the expectable difficulties in the field of the supply after the movement in ahead. On 26 February arrived at Berat the complements for the *Belluno* Bn. and the 28th a complete battalion for the 52nd infantry. Enough, but not too much.

The *Pusteria* had to carry out demonstrative action in the Osum valley with three alpine Bns. and one *camicie nere* and, in particular, to get hold with a Bn. of crest of the Shkemb i Selajit in order to guarantee the left flank of the *Cacciatori*. This had to move with six infantry Bns., three alpine and two *camicie nere* and the support of six groups of artillery in order to conquer the positions of Mali Spadarit, Bregu Gliulei and Chiaf and Murit and eventually those of Chiaf and Sofiut. The date was from settling down itself. Reasons of uncertainty always remained. Some units were still not found in conditions for striking bay level. As an example, the *Belluno* Bn. had in all 3 officers, 213 among non-commissioned officers and soldiers and 2 machine gunners. No machine-gun and no mortar. For reached its very bad equipment had been. Mercalli was reduced to having to ask the Commander of the Army:

"(...) I at least ask to favor with some machine gunners stop machine-guns stop mortars to take itself at once also near some unit not engaged

7) DS Commando IV army corps, f. dated 01/1012/op. 24.2.1941,

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

stop some rears base much from being able to give the *Belluno* battalion some efficiency & to employ it next requirement is also only garrison positions departure "⁽⁸⁾.

And to the commander of the *Cacciatori*, who represented the difficulty to guide the attack because without reserves and asked was impress greater violence to the action of the *Pusteria*, possibly anticipating for a day, in order to distract the adversary, Mercalli replied:

"First of all I anticipate to You that I for the noted action do not have not even *a soldier of reservoir*. And I do not have it because it I cannot have in way some, while I do not have intentional to embezzle *a soldier* to my divisions, exactly in order not to weaken them mainly.

The action of the *Pusteria* Div. is demanding in depth. The *Pusteria* Division will make what it will be able, all which will be able, very knowing that how much the more it will make so much better will be for the Motherland, that the fore front of our army plays the final decisive paper on all. All the considerations that make me are made before you and many times; but, I repeat, I do not have null. Indeed have obtained, fighting, the 85th cc.nn. Bn. that I hurry to send to the *Pusteria* Div. (...)"⁽⁹⁾.

Then he commented that if the attack of the *Pusteria* had preceded that one of the *Cacciatori*, the only result would have been that the *Pusteria* would have had leans all the fire of the Greek artillery of the every zone let alone possible reaction of movement, and the following day the same thing would happen to the *Cacciatori*, in how much the *Pusteria* in the carried out action alone the day before would have brought back sure "*a few blows*" and it would have been found in the impossibility to help, is also demonstratively, the *Cacciatori*. "Undoubtedly the perplexities of the commander ' of this last division was not active in air - place that, the second information, had to exceed the resistances of the 28th infantry (in effects was be a matter of the 21st pertaining to the 15th Greek Inf. Div.) and of 13th and 50th infantry of the 11th Inf. Div. - therefore Gen. Mercalli taken directed contact with the commander of the Cagliari, in order to clear the competition well who, second the operations order of the VIII Corps, such division would have supplied to the right of IV Corps (52nd infantry). Such competition was conspicuous and he translated in with temporariness of the action and convergence of the effort on the objective of the army corps; the Chiaf Sofiut-Mali Niscites ridge; competition directed with a battalion, destined to act to tight contact with "the right of the 52nd infantry;

8) DS Commando IV army corps, tele 01/F/1120/op. dated 3.3.1941.

9) DS Commando IV army corps , f. 01/1135/op. dated 2.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

fire competition from part of a good five machine-gun companies on the Bregu Shalesit on the opposing positions between Chiaf Bubesit and the village of Bubesi, and also fire competition of artillery in the zone of Poggio Boschetto.

In any case, on the whole, Mercalli was optimistic and thought of being able to reach his objectives, even if to Mussolini it will have to say: *"Have a Command without troops. For two months I have always had to the dependencies Commanders to their time without troops. My job has been that one to amalgamate my units. Six divisions are passages subsequently under my orders"*.

As far as the XXV Corps, that it had on the arms the defense of Tepeleni, Gen. Rossi arranged the participation of his troops in the following way: the *Sforzesca* had to move with the 41st infantry, with two battalions, towards Arza di Sopra and with the "Signorini" group towards Chiaf Mezgoranit; the *Julia* had the task to attack the Golico with the *Gemona* Bn. and to keep itself ready to take advantage of the success one towards Klisura. For all the remaining forces were dealt simply to remain on the resistance position in order to guarantee the integrity. The reserve, was constituted from the "Pizzi" alpine group, by the "Galbiati" cc.nn. grouping and by the 2nd bersaglieres reinforced, would have fed the useful or necessary effort where. It could not sure be said that this competition to the action of the VIII Corps was much incisive. Gen. Geloso took part endured and ordered to modify the dispositions so as to render them intonate to the spirit of its orders: all the *Sforzesca*, and only the 41st infantry, did not have to attack, would various not have been be a matter that of simple a generic coupling. Therefore on Arza di Sopra they had to be started not less than four battalions, naturally spaced out in depth, and on Chiaf Mezgoranit three battalions of which one was alpine.

But the true protagonist of the imminent battle was the VIII army corps. According to the first order circulated from Gen. Gambarà the device contemplated one first formation with three divisions (*Pinerolo*, *Cagliari* and *Puglie*), a second formation with *Bari* and a reserve constituted from the cc.nn. legions of the foretold divisions, united into a formation grouping. But after some day, the Commander of army put to disposition also the *Siena*, that was placed in second formation, while its legion joined to the reserve. Finally, there was an further increment of forces had, indirectly, to Mussolini. The Duce meant to be present at the March battle: he waited for a long time and this time seemed that all it had to go for the best.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

he arrived in Albania a week before the beginning and the duration of the offensive was withheld for all. It had been preceded from numerous structured *mobilizations*. For a month there was already Farinacci, with the assignment of Inspector of the cc.nn. in Albania: he turned for the Commanders and his conversations with the commanders and the officials of elevated degree more always struck on the topic of the confidence that to these provoked first. He was felt sorry to show himself informed and his judgments were demonstrated often imprinted to incompetence and to too much political factiousness. They were arriving also many ministers. Ciano commander a bomber group based in Italy, but he was made to see often at Tirana, also abstaining interfering in the conduct of the operations and attending the Commanders. Bottai and Ricci commanding respective to a mountain battalion and a bersaglieres battalion, Cianeui a artillery battery, and must say that they took care themselves exclusively of the unit entrusted revealing on the valorous battlefield soldiers and commanders bonds. Starace, also exempt from burden with chief of general staff of the M.V.S.N., was recalled which colonel of the bersaglieres and, not existing the possibility of entrust the command of a regiment, remained to disposition of the Comando Superiore. Also for he it is right to recognize that his presence between the soldiers exclusively was turned to raise the moral and to urge the victory and that, from bravely which he had shown in the first world war, it did not scorn the first lines in the dangerous moments. The others for more let to go to excessive political dispatches made up of slanders and of subjects of gossip and in complex their presence was decidedly more cluttered than useful. The coming of Mussolini was, in the cares of the conduct of the Generals, providential: all, with the exception of those who had unit responsibility, they were collected around him and therefore ended that troublesome boring and bustle of intruders between the Commands. Mussolini with his presence did not influence on the operating plan neither on the course of the maneuver⁽¹⁰⁾. It stretched, since from November, to speeds up more the offensive resumption against Greece. Then sure one had not formed precise ideas on the conditions created from the failure of the initial plan begins, but the events succeeded had made sure to comprise as express was not simple of placing remedy to the political and military errors and the deficiencies of preparation that had lead us to the painful situation of November 1940, whose consequences were

10) Testimony of Gen. Geloso.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

been supported in order every month winter with the creation of situations that had not lead to irreparable backs for the tenacity of who had been only struck to the better, without to lose hope.

Mussolini arrived at 09:45 of 2 March at Tirana and departed at once with Cavallero and Geloso for Paraboar (Commander IV Corps) and Rehova (Commander VIII Corps), where it was withheld in a short talk with the two commanders. Thereafter he continued for Lakatun (P. 22, one of the tactical Commands of Gen. Cavallero). He found Gen. Pirzio Biroli, new commander of the 9th Army, convened from Cavallero that meant to ask the *Piemonte*, without the artillery regiment, in order to support the maneuver in Deshnicës valley, and were inquired highly summarized on the alignment of his army. In the days previous to the offensive he meticulously visited the four Corps of the 11th Army, the divisions in reserve, the logistic device. In successive meeting he wanted to be infoemed of the conception of the operation, and the particular of the preparation, than it they were rendered famous also in the still existing deficiencies, especially in the cares of the artilleries and ammunitions; he spoke with all the commanders about the major unit and from each he knew the tasks receipts and the modalities on which it counted to acquit them. He approved of all without never to deepen excessively the examination, of to discuss how much had been already realized. A lot was shown, perhaps too much, satisfied and, not giving excessive weight to the deficiencies that also he had been openly illustrated, he manifested, as was in his impulsive character, great confidence in a huge outcome. And this, if those who were a good in the cares of the moral energies of all had to act, it was not for the Country, which, with the propaganda that derived from such exaggerated optimism, said reason to hope in much advanced developments to that really they could be caught up and that the responsible Command it thought possible at first. The relationship of greater prominence was that held 4 March at Rehova. All the main commanders had the word, to turn, in order to make the point and to illustrate salient notes of the respective units:

Gen. De Stefanis: the *Pinerolo* had 9.000 men, of which 6,000 combatants, was introduced in the regiments the complements which arrived a week before and he was introduced to the appointment with the Bn. with approximately 500 men. Many mules and various arms lacked of the unit: 50 machine gunners, 12 machine-guns and 20 mortars of 45 mm. As far as the officers he was calm even if several manifested training deficiencies; of the commanders of battalion, two, evidently

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

not up to the task, they had been replaced by captains in s.p.e. very good;

Gen. Gianni: the Cagliari, reached for a month, was online gives beyond two weeks and its behavior had been good. The Achille's heel was in the lack of baggage train; not being possible to employ the cartage, because of the tracing of the muleteer, the draft animals reduced themselves to 25 % of the requirements; for a regiment 60 mules for the equipments of unit and the arms would have only been necessary, and derived that after the first jumo the baggage train would have had to make the bobbin, more and more painful as the penetration would have gotten deeper. Two commanders of Bn. were in s.p.e., and the others of complement;

Gen. D'Aponte: the *Puglie* nearly had the regiments complete or and 70% of the draft animals, but given to the length of the routes this amount was insufficient. To place the commanders of Bn., all In s.p.e.;

Gen. Pizzolato: the *Bari* were to 80% of the personnel and 50% of the draft animals, calculating also those that they were flowing from Valona. The artillery was still found in conditions gets worse because a third part of the baggage train was constituted from local horses. 10% of the pictures were in s.p.e.;

Gen Pizzolato: the *Centauro* was in full reorganization because taken advantage of since the beginning much of the war. It was being reconstituted with a regiment of formation cavalry, a regiment bersaglieres formed with units drawn from the 1st and the 5th bersaglieres, and a tank battalion. The force total amounted to 3,500 men, 50 light tanks and 15 medium and 850 horses;

Col. Lama: the artillery of the VIII corps comprised 60 pieces, assigned to go up to 96, from 75/27 and 100/17; 28 howitzers, of which 25 in arrival, from 105/28; 12 howitzers from 149/13 and 20 guns of which 12 in affluence, from 149/35. Total 150 gun tubes. Technical preparation of the pictures good; a third part of the officials were in s.p.e.;

Col. Crivaro: in the field of the jobs the engineers had made a lot but not all for lack of handicraftsmen and labor. It had of 200 specialists and 700 laborers and thought of being able to restore in the expectable course of the offensive the main interruptions, but it was necessary the lumber, that it was not only translate in a problem of availability of material but also of transports. As far as the transmissions, the critical point always was represented from the batteries for the radio stations;

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Gen. Gambara: *"Reorganization, especially of difficulty is various types and especially that one of the mules. For which I ask for delay the action in order to be able well to employ all collected means. This postponement goes well also for Mercalli. With two days of time in more the Puglie it will be able to become part more comfortably between the Cagliari and the Pinerolo and the artilleries will be able to be put in emplacement that are arriving today".*

Approximately the beginning date, the desire of Cavallero was to anticipate it most possible: he had already established 6 March, but obviously the reasons of a movement were more than valid. You feel all, Mussolini taken the word:

"First of all thanks to have exposed the situation in ideal topic, that is without to hide the difficulties and the deficiencies. These deficiencies impose that the action is delayed. Today with Cavallero already was spoken to carry it also to the 9th. This action has great importance. It does not have to be begun if all is not *pié di operà*. It must arrange men, means and services so that the action, once begun, does not have uncertainties and proceeds with energetic and decisive rhythm.

You know the operation in its essential lines and know which forces are employed, forces that are increased from the infantry of the *Piemonte* division that Pirzio Biroli, with which I have spoken yesterday evening, has given without difficulty. The divisions are six, plus one grouping. One knows them to the 40-50 force battalions, including the cc.nn., therefore it can be counted on an imposing number, if the artillery alignment joins that goes to 400 gun tubes, that they allow one remarkable preparation.

Therefore, without an excessive optimism a tactical one can reasonably be attended large succeeding and probably also some strategic success. The reasons that induce me to this are: the strong selection in the pictures and the men who have been in the army in Albania. It is true that they are flowed the complements, but have been able to amalgamate themselves and to do training. The situation of the enemy. Many times we have said ourselves that the initial Greek effort was getting exhausted. This exhaustion not has been. The Greeks, more or less well, have always churned with that prudent foxy behavior and that corresponds to some of their racial peculiar characteristics. The had successes have galvanized them, but now the situation is changing for effect of objective conditions of fact that are reassumed in following:

- threat of the Germany through Bulgaria;
- adhesion of Bulgaria to the Tripartite Pact;
- entrance of the Germans in Bulgaria in order to push itself towards Greek Thrace.

This march proceeds with a rhythm that is not very quick. It must hold account that to Berlin hopes that the single threat can induce the Greeks to the yield. It can are given that this threat is accelerated for effect of the English participation.

Our intelligence has not been able to currently assess with precision the entity of the English forces in Greece, but it seems that features not more than 50,000 men between special troops and services. But if they had to disembark

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

or more English divisions at Salonicco, the Germany would launch against the English forces its divisions, than they can be estimated to a some thirty, of which approximately 6 between motorized and armored.

Greece cannot hope. It cannot that succumb (...).

Is probable that the German movement is slow for the sake of making to reflect Greece. I have made to know to means of the Military attaché in Berlin, General Marras, that at the time very good, in the shape clearer and, between parenthesis, serious, that it is not spoken about armistice, conditions or negotiations if before the Italian army has not inflicted a decisive and serious blow to the Greek army. I do not want that the victory is defrauded to us from anyone and no more of the Germans, that they are most jealous of the prestige of the Reich, must comprise (...).

A personality very important for Yugoslavia has defined the situation saying that from a Greece drunkenness is last to the anxiety, from which as always it is passed to the collapse. Now, the operation that we undertake must be the prelude of that collapse. The information of this source are agree in saying that the opposing situation has gotten worse in this last week. The operation where therefore to be lead with extreme fine energy and from the first hours it must be seen like going to the end.

The troops that I have seen in these days are animated from a spirit who can itself be defined arrogant. I have only seen those of the zone between rears and Commanders of C.A., but we know that those that they are in ahead have the same perhaps better spirit and, like always success. These troops are commanded from valorous that I estimate very many. Therefore the objective conditions for the success one are all.

Then there are those subjective ones. We must make to feel our determined will. To a sure point it must make to feel the Greeks that we are advancing and that they must be folded in knee. It is clearly that a breakthrough, a breach, must be make to happen the tumbling.

For the operation advanced difficulties to our possibilities are not previewed. The 11th army, guided by Gen. Geloso that I have always estimated, with of the commanders of army corps like Gambara, Mercalli and Rossi, has not mathematical, satisfactory the security, if that the action must endured to determine success. It does not have hold you limit and to want, to want, before with the attack and then with the fine exploitation in depth.

Not there is need to say that the People await this action. It divides itself in two categories. Nearly the totality of the Italians, is worth to say 44,950,000 Italians, are disposed to any sacrifice. In these months they are deep wounds. They did not understand what happened. I have said to many, and also to Hitler - than, between parenthesis, he admires the Italian people and he knows that the general, that they have been here and in Africa, have made the praise of the Italian soldier - than not is possibility of compromises between us and Greece.

I have said Hitler that no army could have endured the initiative of the Greeks without to roll, because the Italian army has not been defeated, has not been struck. Greece has adopted the tactics of the money box, given its foxy nature. We have been rejected without being struck and now we resume that that we have lost, but the result will not be as well as the land how much the battered possession deeply and irreparable the Greek army.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The 11th Army has the privilege of being first. Then the action of the 9th will come and then the operation could be harmonized with the German advance on Salonicco. But before the decisive German participation we are that we must strike the enemy and Hitler will give the necessary time to us. But in order not to lose time, but in order to employ it in the preparations. Two, three or four days and to a sure point to release, because it cannot be expected that the Germans wait indefinitely.

We will attack when everyone of you will say to me that he is ready. Cavallero has made the plan. We are sure that it will have application. Therefore between the 8th and the 9th. It will be between you and the account of stay until the epilogue of this bet, that I already see to delineate itself in way in compliance with the aspirations of the Italian people. Between the Italians they are some approximately 50,000 of the second category, but do not count. People that is raised to the 10th, than spy and that he speaks because have the language in mouth, like the animals that they make of the backs.

The Italian people, therefore, wait for the events and know that it will be victory. We must be put in head, like a faith action, that England it cannot gain from this war, therefore it cannot that to lose it For this underhand its allying we will withhold the pledges, holding present that when conserve is gained all that that has been taken care.

I mean that of how much I have said reaches the echo all yours subordinates"⁽¹¹⁾.

The last days passed quickly in the completion, for how much possible one of the apparatus.

Considering the enemy alignment, well known, comprised the arrival of the 6th Inf. Div.; holding account of the conditions of the troops with which the offensive had to be delivered; having present the characteristics of the land on which it had to be acted, it is lawful to formulate many reservoirs on the opportunity of the operation. The political reason can wide be comprehensible: "*The express development of the political-military events of these days* - wrote Gen. Geloso to Gambara, on 2 March: - *he advises to lock the times and to leave, even if not most complete* ", but just in this campaign the political reasons, or pseudo political, they had exercised a deadly role. And also reasonable desire to prevent or at least to attack violently, to more soon, the enemy in order not leave a free hand in the new attempt that was predisposing against Tepeleni and to avoid that other element of the defense succeeded to unhinge some, but, sliding relationships and correspondence of several the commanders on the preparation

11) Cavallero diary, date 4.3.1941. The better comment to such oratorical exhibition belongs, of all involuntarily, to the same Mussolini. At 16:30, during the trip of return, stopped at the Command of the IV Corps, he telephoned to Gen. Esposito, commander of the *Pusteria*: "... *Ho held, a meeting to which you have not participated; but you have not lost anything (...)*"!

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of the units, the impression of one is not gained cold appraisal of reasonable succeeding possibilities of, and not even of deliberate risk. Just Gambarà had said to Geloso: "*the truth is this: the combat, for how much is said and make yourself, represents always an unknown quantity. When one has that that it is thought indispensable the unknown quantity to diminish; contrary case, increases of the square*" Must deduce that it was convinced that the VIII Corps had the indispensable one in order to win? It is not allowed any doubt. But he is he, both Geloso, and Cavallero had committed a judgment error on the offensive ability to our troops, still in way of collection to the eve of the offensive. And Gambarà and Geloso did not remember to have resolutely asserted that the risk of one could not be run a checkmate.

To find that Gen. Guzzoni explicitly had been declared contrary to an action in the Deshnicës valley. For he was by far preferable to renounce to local participations and to concentrate instead every attention in the eastern field, reserving every possibility to the decisive counter-offensive. On 25 February, in fact, annotated on the historical diary of the Comando Supremo to have delivered to Mussolini a note on said operation. Also in this note, like in a previous introduced study on 17 January, he had insisted on the convenience to take part in the correspondence of Korçano, where smaller was the density of the enemy forces and from where the advance would have approached the Italian line of operations that German. From Korça, then, it would have been possible to head towards the south-west, heading for the bridge of Premeti in order to go around the Greek alignment in Vojussa valley. In short, he expressed the warning that the counter-offensive in on the point of releasing was destined to failure: the absence of a satisfactory superiority of forces, the debatable director of attack, the probable lack of the surprised factor - since the Greeks, also admitting that they were picked of wrong-footing at the beginning, the first difficulties had sufficient possibility to exceed without much damage - introduced uncertain the breach of the Greek forehead and men that less the attainment of the strategic objective. For converged, divisions would have been worn away uselessly that they had to serve to the counter-offensive from Korça, previewed also by Cavallero. Much better, therefore, to limit themselves to contain in the field of Tepeleni and to concretely give hand to the collection of the mountain troops the shelter of the Kamia, preparing itself at the same time delivering the great offensive at the irruption of the Germans from Bulgaria. And Guzzoni returned from the drive accompanying Mussolini to the airport, trying to convince him in extremis suspending

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

the counter-offensive in Deshnicës valley. All it was hopeless: Mussolini felt sure for the enthusiasm of Gambara and the guaranty of Cavallero. Much sure to return to caress a old idea never left to fall of all. At the end January he had already ordered to Guzzoni to make to study from the three General Staffs an action of invasion on Preveza, Cefalonia and Xante to carry out "*as soon as possible*"⁽¹²⁾; now - as Guzzoni informed Cavallero - it was in gestation an operation of invasion with cc.nn. battalions at Preveza and, eventually, a launch of parachutists in the zone of the channel of Corinto in order to avoid possible damage⁽¹³⁾!

2. THE ATTACK

As it has been seen, the action was been born as a counter-offensive in order to arrest the Greek push on the front of the Tepeleni; only subsequently, and in sight of the political situation that was maturing, the vision had been increased and had induced to think to a strategic exploitation, but the lines of the maneuver were remained unchanged. The conviction existed that the direction of the Korçano would have been more profitable, but given the times did not seem possible to take advantage of it. And then there was always the fear for Tepeleni, that it attracted towards Klisura. The operation substantially was entrusted to the IV and VIII army corps; on the whole, six divisions with a total of 301 pieces from campaign, 87 guns and howitzers of medium-caliber gun and 18 howitzers from 240. The XXV Corps, numbering in its turn of six divisions with 212 pieces from campaign and 50 of medium-caliber gun, hardly was engaged in the resumption of the fight for Tepeleni and its competition on the western flank of the Deshnicës valley, that corps could be decisive in order to facilitate the outlet of the VIII, was delineated much limited. For reached the renewed Greek attempt astride of the Vojussa and Dhrinos valleys had caused other damage: the reserves of the army had been curtailed of two divisions, the *Legnano*, introduced online during the first phase of the battle of Tepeleni and clearly mortgaged also for the second phase, and the *Julia* inserted subsequently in the alignment of the XXV Corps. So that the Italian initiative was introduced, first still to begin, with much smaller perspectives of deep success

12) DSCS, f. 5935 date 30.1.1941.

13) Ibid, f. 7138 date 10.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

and be able of strategic developments of how much it had not been instead conceived and hoped when the maneuver had been devised.

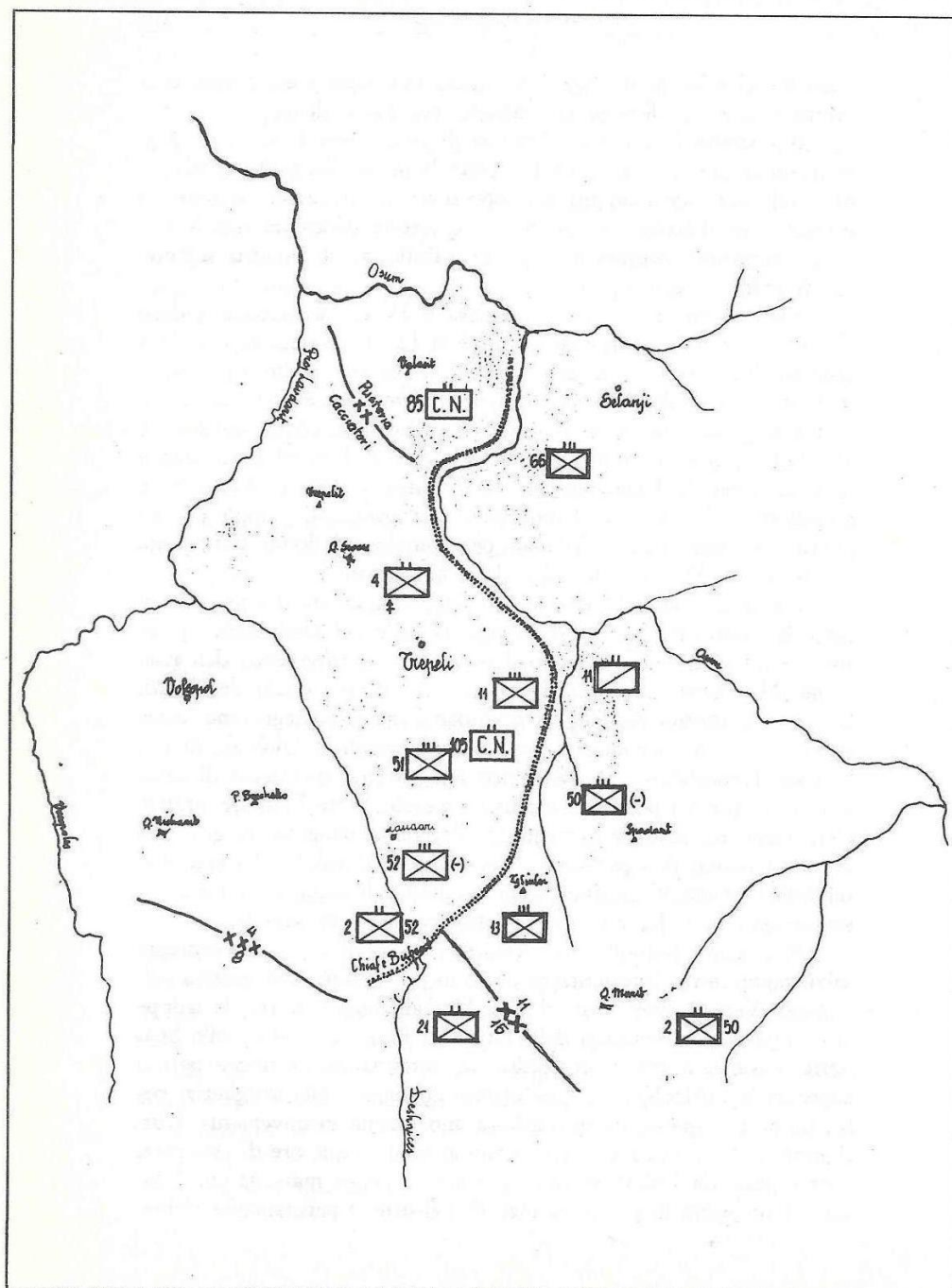
On the 8th was circulated the order of attack for the next day. The hour of beginning was established for all the units at 08:30; in relation to such hour the commanders of army corps had to regulate the preparation of artillery in the respective field. Considering the forces directly interested to the counter-offensive, the opposite alignments were the following.

In the sector head of the Deshnicës valley the IV Corps had the *Cacciatori* with eleven battalions against the Greek 11th Inf. Div. with eight battalions. In the center sector the VIII Corps put online thirty-eight the battalions of the *Pinerolo*, *Cagliari*, *Puglie*, *Bari* and *Siena* against the Greek II Corps, that it could count on ten battalions of the 1st and 15th Inf. Div. and, nearly sure, also on the nine of the 6th Inf. Div., collection, in the zone of Toliari in reserve of army corps. In the southern field, the XXV Corps employed the *Sforzesca*, the Signorini alp. group, the Galbiati cc.nn. reg. for total twelve battalions against the Greek 5th Inf. Div. with ten battalions.

Between 07:00 and 07:30 the artillery preparation had beginning - on all the front of the 11th Army along the of the Deshnicës valley. It was intense and to it the programmed participation of aviation was accompanied. But once again the results were not those wished for. If under the psychological profile the stormi that followed themselves without stopping in the sky, making to rain bombs by the hundred on the Mali, in the valleys and on the Trebeshines, they gave a show of force effectively and constituted a mighty moral incentive, under the practical aspect there was less cheer in how much the bombing, executed a great height, it could not obtain the intentional effects and "screw" the assurances lacked to the appointment in spite of the agreements taken and given. The consequences were soon made to feel.

In the northern sector (sketch n. 96) the IV Corps achieved initially a success promising in depth on the left of the Osum. Towards noon Gen. Mercalli signaled that the troops were found in proximity of the heights of Bregu Gliulei and Spadarit: the advance was hard fought, however it had up to now been able to exceed the difficulties thanks to the optimal support of the artillery; but, just in this sector, the first disadvantages emerged. The C.A. artillery was already in crisis after hardly five hours of the advance: seven pieces from 149/35 were firing at maximum load with limitations with projectiles for ballistae lack, repeatedly demanded

LA SITUAZIONE DEL IV CORPO IL 7 MARZO



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

but not obtained, and the two groups horse-drawn from 100, laboriously lined up, were by now to the throw limits. "*Of more and than better it cannot be made* - commented Gen. Mercalli - *within this evening confide strongly to occupy objectives of Bregu Gliulei and the Spadarit, what that I would have already made if I had to my disposition more powerful and more numerous artilleries*". The evening the three columns of the *Cacciatori*, by from the intercrossed fire of the defense and from the repeated counterassaults, had to stop and Mercalli was found in strong distresses, not having sufficient baggage train in order to carry out during the night the movement of the division artilleries and in with time in order guaranteeing the supply of provisions and ammunitions. More to north, the *Pusteria* had been attested to the village of Selanij, where the combat continued. The commander of the IV Corps asked to the Army Commander with something of urgency all the mountain trucks that could found, removing them for who did not use or could however less make some to them: "*without share mountain trucks - he wrote - I cannot tomorrow assure supplying of the army corps that operationally is advancing*". As result of the first twenty-four hours was not very consoling.

More to the south (sketch n. 97), the XXV Corps had its problems: from the Beshishtit to the Golico a Greek onslaught were followed, hour against hour against the other position, so that the *Sforzesca* could not evidently receive all the attention that the maneuver counter-offensive demanded. At 09:30 Geloso urged Rossi to proceed with decision in the attack, especially with the column to the left of the *Sforzesca*, without worries for the flank exposed to the zone of hill 1308 of the Trebeshines, because this was held constantly under the artillery fire. At the end of the day, the lead column from Col. De Renzi was being struck in the houses of Arza di Sopra in order extending the possession to all the country, while the group "Signorini" had made road slowly until to one hundred meters from Chiaf Mezgorarut.

To the center at 07:00 began the preparation of artillery of the VIII Corps. It lasted an hour and a half according to a plan of meticulously studied employment. They had been constituted three groupings of army corps artillery: one "of counter-battery", with three groups of 105/28 and a group of 100/17; one "of far action" with two groups of 149/35; one "of maneuver" with two groups of 75/27 and a group of 149/13. Under the direct dependencies of the artillery Commander remained a howitzer group of 240/12 with two batteries. Altogether, on the entire front of the army corps they were deployed

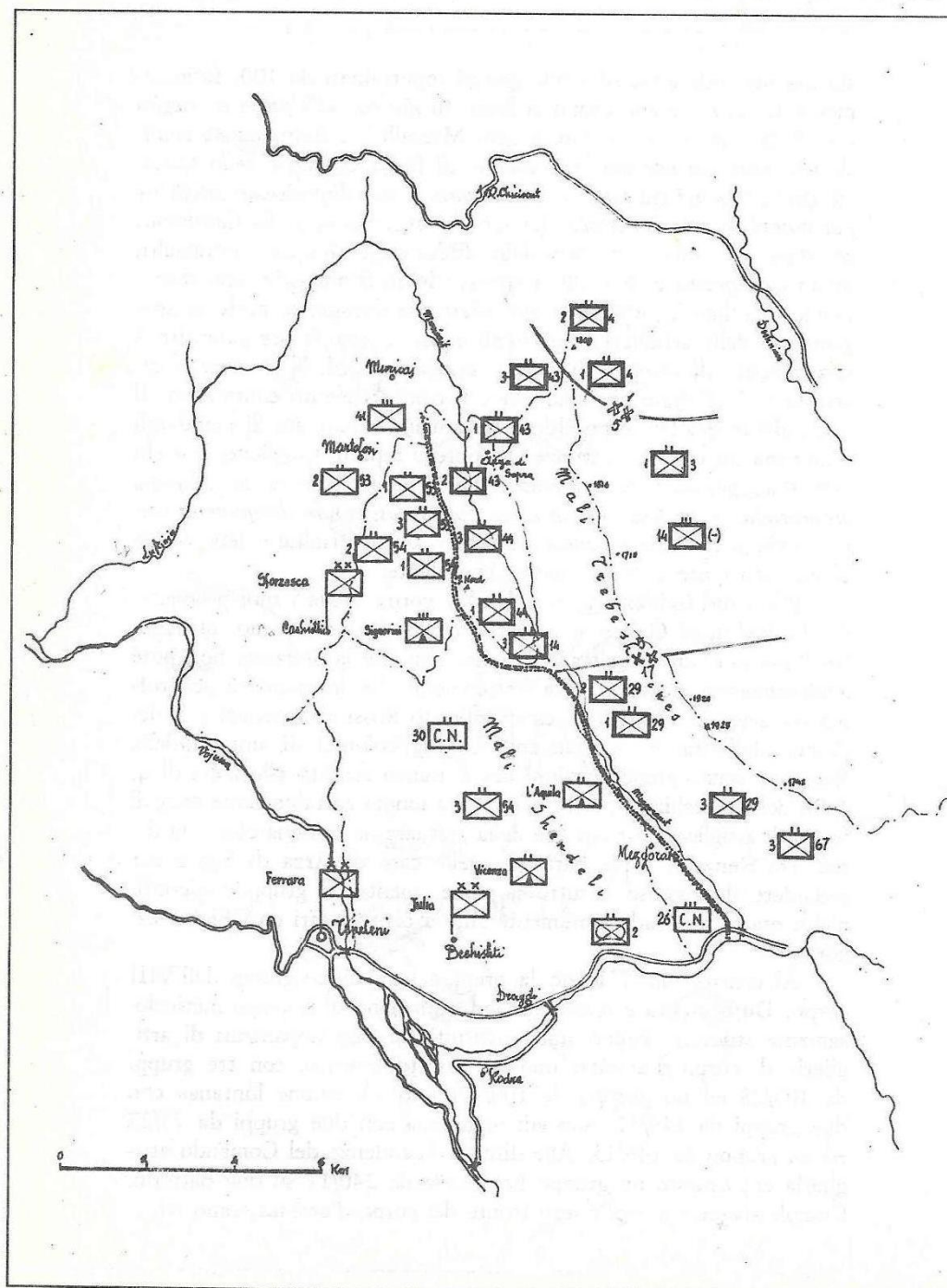
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 612

The situation with the XXV Army Corps to the north with the Vojussa on 7 March

Schizzo n. 97

LA SITUAZIONE DEL XXV CORPO A NORD DELLA VOJUSSA



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

350 gun tubes, with three-four *unit of fire* for the division artilleries and of army corps and one *unit of fire* for those of army.

The hoard of 140,000 rounds, par to approximately 2,200 tons, had involved the employment of 900 trucks/trips, but it had been necessary to resort also to the transport to arms: just the artillerymen of the *Cagliari* had to carry on their shoulders for eight kilometers of muddy mule track 25,000 rounds equal to 250 tons.

After all, 350 pieces opened the most intense fire (43,000 rounds, of which 14,000 from 81 mm mortars) at the end of which the three divisions in first formation left the lines of departure (sketch 98). Unfortunately type and qualities of the artilleries were not to the height of the need. In the field of the *Cagliari* the 63rd infantry came soon arrested without being able to reach Bregu Rapi. The attack was renewed: after a new preparation of a quarter of hour (from 10:00 to 10:15) the first time; after the insertion of the 64th infantry on the right of the 63rd and one preparation of a half hour the second time. But also these attempts proved useless and to evening the division had not earned that some hundreds of meters. In the zone of Monastero the *Puglie*, after a favorable beginning, driven out by a counterattack nearly on the initial positions. To the extreme south the *Pinerolo* acted: moved towards Chiaf and Lusit and it exceeds by impulse the enemy advanced elements, soon saw its penetration is made more and more painful. From the Trebeshines and in particular from hill 1308 most serious was the fire offense that was flowing on the attacking columns; the possession estimate of that pillar was demonstrated, to the yield of the accounts, absolutely indispensable for being able to end up in the Deshnicës valley. The fire of all the artilleries that could act concentrated on hill 1308 and aircraft executed repeated massive bombings, but all that to been worth nothing. The heavy artilleries, able of truly effective effects, were insufficient; the aerial bombing was carried out too much from the high and it was demonstrated imprecise.

From the observatory of Mt. Komarit the bombs were seen at to disperse on all the mountain mass, but in spite of the nagging demand for bombers in dive advanced from Geloso it was not possible to have what perhaps it would have been the resolute participation. The battle had assumed a *phenomenal*, such character that is to engage attacking and hardly defending, to provoke sensitive losses, but to little allowed as tangible result only the gain land. There is also to say that the automatic arms quickly placed give the defense it succeeded to arrest any frontal effort: of the division artillery

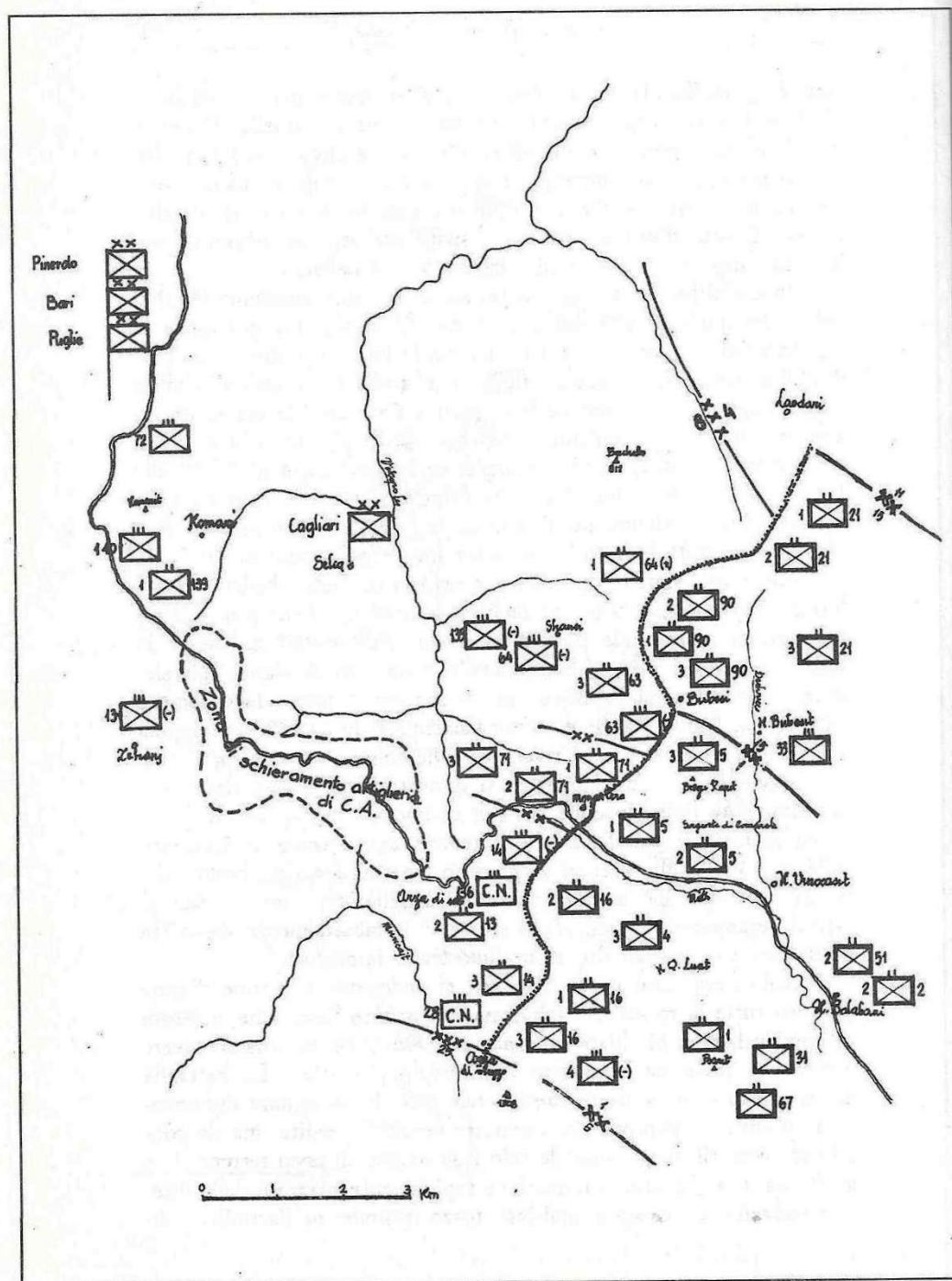
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 614

The situation with the VIII Army Corps on 7 March

Schizzo n. 98

LA SITUAZIONE DELL'VIII CORPO IL 7 MARZO



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

was sufficient to make them keep quiet, because their location turned out precarious. The only truly appreciable advantage obtained from Italian side was that one to force the enemy to desist feeding the effort against the Shendeli. At 19:00 Geloso, approval the course of the fight, ordered to maintain everywhere to the strait contact with the adversary by means of strong combat patrols and stopping on the positions reached, supplying to assume all the measures necessary in order to guarantee of the balance possession. The next day the action had to resume with decision, conferring to the columns the possible maximum staggering in depth and timely supporting the division that mainly was penetrated in depth.

But a few reassuring symptoms of weakness existed and Geloso here and there, who perceived them, soon after (19:40 hours) ordered that "*without to lose time troops they are strengthened on the positions - reached that they must also be guaranteed with wide solid and controlled service of security*". In short, at dark of the first day they could be considered eliminated the advance structure of the defense, but pauses, hitch, deficiencies of coordination they had delayed the investment of the position of enemy resistance, still not seriously damaged in some point.

The counter-offensive resumed at dawn of 10 March. In the sector of the IV Corps, the attack of the 11th alpine, in conditions of rain and fog driven in at times thunder, had partial and only temporary success. The *Feltre* Bn., proceeding decidedly against the Greek positions, succeeded towards noon to put foot on the summit of the Spadarit but, not supported by the 104th cc.nn. Bn - commanded temporary by a centurion arrived from *one day* and therefore completely confused - and remained practically without officials, it could not resist when the adversary, that he had hasty abandoned the height, aware that the weak occupation units did not have the aid of the immediate aid of other units, delivered the counterattack. The participation of the others two alpine Bns, delayed in the fog, adequately was not coordinated in the area of the column and turned out late, also because of an unexpected clearing that uncovered them. As far as the *Cacciatori*, its units did not succeed to acquire impulse.

The VIII Corps had also a disappointment. The *Puglie*, than at first had obtained some success on the southern slopes of Bregu Rapit, was rejected in the late afternoon from a Greek reaction and Gen. Gambarà was forced to reinforce it with the grouping

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

cc.nn. that to the morning, when the things seemed to proceed favorably, it had been started in the zone to the west of Monastero. The *Pinerolo*, for its part its somewhat improved the penetration towards Chiaf and Lusit, but in such way not to unblock the situation. The *Cagliari*, finally, did not obtain any progress. Between the other its commander had become ill and been replaced temporally by the commander of the 63rd infantry.

The XXV Corps was to the taken ones with the Greek offensive: the prosecution of the effort on the Golico removed the possibility of to press with greater vigor to the action of its advance to favor of the VIII: the Greek Command had reduced to frontal attack, having limited it to the Golica, against which he acted from the Dhrinos valley and from the Zagorias trying going around it to north of the Vojussa. The defenders, which the *Legnano* had joined, did not yield but the attention of Gen. Rossi, for as much as he had at his disposition forces adapted, was naturally polarized on Tepeleni, that it knew of having to hold at whichever cost and whose defended constituted however an element base for the attainment of the ends that the battle was proposed, It turned out that not only the infantries were projected to the resistance around the Golico, but also the fire of the medium-caliber artilleries gun ended for being employed more to favor of the positions of the Golico that in support to the attacks towards Chiaf Mezgoranit and on the Arze. Also Mussalini was taken more care for the Golico that for the outcome of the counter-offensive. In the conduct of this never inserted, in part some generic comment, while his inframmettenza became in some moments nagging for how much concerned Tepeleni. All the interference of Geloso and his assurances on the total solidity of the *Ferrara*, the *Julia* and the *Legnano* were not enough to render it trusting, much from induce to propose repeatedly meeting at Tepeleni in order to give close supervision to the events, abandoning the tactical Command of Gllava, from where Geloso was in a position to directing the battle, both in the defensive part and in that counter-offensive. Naturally the commander of the army did not join such desire, but he was also in order to calm the anxieties of Mussolini that the *Lupi di Toscana*, already previously approached by Mavrova Tepeleni, was put to disposition of General Rossi.

Since from the beginning of the Mussolini operation had been placed to the observatory of Mt. Komarit, where numerous visitors alternated themselves yearnings to make time with the Duce. For how much account had become very soon that hard one was be a matter of a bone much to gnawed at, manifested

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

a sure tranquility. Cavallero had perceived that the Yugoslavia was in order to join to the Tripartite Pact under sure conditions and, thinking next to such political agreement and to the Germanic participation, he said that, according to him, the Greeks would be themselves withdraw slowly opposing resistances until the old border. But for the moment some symptom of withdraw did not exist. Indeed, it was the much clear will of the Greeks to resist in place, although the strong wear and tear which their units were subject and the dejection that began to outline themselves, than Gen. Geloso ordered to the *Siena* to approach and to carry itself in the zone of Zehanjanj, to back of the alignment of the army corps artilleries, and to the *Centauro* to transfer near Gllava, its conspicuous share, with two tank Bns and two bersaglieres Bns. The employment of the *Siena* was discussed. Cavallero inclined in order launch it on Hill 1308 of the Trebeshines, but Gambara, consult, much too difficult "*contrary was shown*" because. The mood of the chiefs was not happy: the counter-offensive did not succeed. Also Mussolini had understood⁽¹⁴⁾ to it and therefore to decide well on the two feet to make to flow at once from Italy two, divisions "*for the battle in course*". And Cavallero so much appreciated the thing by telephone at 19:00 to Gen. Roatta, asked of which divisions was be a matter, and what was their state of preparation. In any case, he wanted at once the infantries with the units transmissions and a part of the baggage train⁽¹⁵⁾.

The morning of the 11th only the *Puglie* resumed the attack, but towards 10:00 its movement, that it stretched to the encircling of Bregu Rapit, was arrested. In the meantime the *Bari* received order to become part between *Puglie* and *Cagliari* and to head straight for the Deshnicës valley. At 18:00 all the divisions in first formation renewed the effort: after alternate vicissitudes the situation, to the falling of the night, remained unchanged; also the nocturnal participation of the battalions in first group of the *Bari*, along the north slopes of the ridge that from Monastero the portal to hill 731, without success. The battle had assumed all the characteristics of a wearing down operation and, as such, it did not leave opened many hopes for an express attainment of important objects in the tactical field, suitable to allow a strategic development. The enemy had opposite a tenacious resistance and much assets in the reaction had been shown: always most ready to counter-assault

14) A few hours after the beginning of the attack, Mussolini said to Gen. Pricolo: "*the offensive already is failed*". F. PRICOLO, op. cit., page 344.

15) Cavallerco diary, dated 10.3.1941, the divisions were the *Casale* and *Firenze*.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

here where our unit was successful to overwhelm its defense in some point of the resistance position. Such ascertainment, with the sparsely of medium-caliber gun artillery and the insufficient aerial aid, made to doubt of the convenience to continue in the counter-offensive, much more than at least the attempt to place aim to the pressure on Tepeleni it had been reached. But, of other side, exactly this suspension of the Greek efforts, the shown always smaller mordant from the enemy, the gradually taken place reduction in the attack front was a clear indication of the diminished potentiality of the adversary; the reserves by now lacked to the enemy and the deployed troops bravely stood the hardest sacrifices that but had evidently worn away they and that they could constitute a not far away warning sign of yielding. Also the moral had been remarkably shaken: the prisoners attested, that they did not show more the self-confident certainty of victory of those captured in the previous months and that they showed themselves much taken care of a next participation of the Germany: the presence of British troops in the ground of Greece did not seem they sufficient in order to prevent the German invasion of the peninsula. It had to draw profit from such situation in order to try to resolve with our forces the Greek problem. It was resolved therefore to continue the combat. The evening of the 11th Gen. Geloso communicated the decision to the commanders of army corps:

"Today that Corps can be defined of stasis in the sectors IV & VIII must have concurred reorders unit before adequate formation & improvement attack device stop Means that tomorrow morning 12th in the sectors IV & VIII Corps is resumption the offensive action with maximum resoluteness & decision in order to reach at all costs the objectives assigned as from previous directives stop (...).

The battle in course demands from part of all maximum decision, resoluteness & tenacity stop attacked to bottom taking advantage of timely happened where & is delineated the victory will be sure ours here".⁽¹⁶⁾

Geloso had intention to carry online the *Siena*. While the VIII Corps would have continued in the attempt to open a passage in the enemy devise in order to penetrate into the Deshnicës valley, the *Siena* would have attacked the Trebeshines from the northern slopes heading at hill 1308, that it was the pillar from which the greater offenses came on the right of the VIII Corps. The XXV, lightened by the *Lupi di Toscana* in the defense of the Vojussa valley, would have resumed the action

16) DS Commando 11th army, tele 02555/op. dated 11.3.1941, hours 20:40.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

with the *Sforzesca* and at least an alpine grouping on the Arze and to Chiaf Mezgoranit, heading at the Trebeshines in cooperation with the *Siena*. However it is doubtful that the *Sforzesca* could do a lot more offensive. Gen. Ollearo therefore illustrated the conditions of the division to the Army Commander, that he had asked comparisons after the combats for the 9th and the 10th:

-41st infantry: one Bn. with 650 men, the others on the 350-400 men; the companies reduced of 40-50%; a Bn. it was commanded by a lieutenant of complement being fallen on the field the holder;

-53rd infantry: battalions with the 250-280 men; companies reduced of 40-50%; a Bn. it had lost for the second one it turns the commander and it was held, at the moment, from a complement lieutenant; another had also lost it the commander and the substitute was of mediocre intelligence;

-54th infantry: battalions with the 350-500 men; companies reduced of 20-30%; good commanders;

-30th legion cc.nn.: Bn. with 150 men and one on 250 men; both lacking ones in titular commanders; pictures reduced of 50-60%; .

- group "Signorini": Bn. Bolzano remained with 150 men with losses of 70% in the companies; the *Val Cismon* with 650 men and much efficient one; the Cervino reduced to an official and 30 alpini. The highest moral;

-17th artillery: optimal efficiency.

In any case the plan did not have performance because General Cavallero, after to have at first shared it, ended in order to think it excessive expensive. The attack to the Trebeshines was put from part, been worth some to move the Comandante Superiore from the opposition the consideration that to feed the action of the VIII Corps in the valley bottom was equally, if, more expensive with smaller hopes not to arrive to success of a some entity and that action on the Trebeshines it would be redounded to advantage of the defense of Tepeleni and, consequently, to relief of the XXV Corps. The battle continued, therefore, on the same guidelines it began.

At dawn of 12 March the *Bari*, than from the late previous afternoon developed the action slowly, were stopped not succeeding to exceed the fire barrier of automatic arms, mortars and artilleries in front of the Greek surveillances. Its battalions in first group

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

they had endured huge losses and they had absolutely to fall back itself. The *Cagliari* had been attacked on the right, towards midnight, after an intense preparation duration of a pair of hours. The opposing collision had been rejected, but the divisional device, predisposed for the attack of those morning, of was remained disorganized, being necessary to employ more ready units for the offensive task. The *Puglie*, then, appeared therefore worn out that Gen. Gambara, of agreement with the commander of the army, decided to withdraw it from the alignment, leaving in place, in its place, *Bari*, much more than the battalions than this last one had been intermingled with those of 71st and 72nd infantry.

That Mussolini evening, returning from Elbasan, where he had met with Gen. Pirzio Biroli, had a long talk with Gen. Geloso on the situation that had been determined:

"Mussolini: the infantries of the three attacking divisions have proceeded little: the *Pinerolo*, most, has made little; the *Puglie* has made still less, the *Cagliari* has practically not moved. I have had nearly endured the feeling that the action did not proceed well. Yesterday has put online the *Bari*, but up to now null it has made. Conclusion: we have four divisions stopped. It is necessary to get going, holding present that we have others two divisions available, two must arrive from Italy and, if necessary, I make some to come two others:

It must continue this attack because if renounced:

- it would turn out evident too much that the action is failed;
- the Greeks could give some displeasure to us, as he already happened after our action on Klisura for the Trebeshines.

He cannot himself be thought to other operations because the time lacks us. The Germany will attack to first of April and it will give us a warning of six days...

I cannot ask Hitler to delay his action because that could have fatal consequences; in fact every delay would concur the increase of too many English in Greece (a division turns out already in course of disembarkation at Attica).

Before the participation of the Germany it is indispensable to obtain a military succeeded since else the Germans would have all the reasons in order to say that the Greeks have yielded for their merit. Therefore the action must continue: if still possible with the breach, otherwise with usury, than but it must be enough quick in way to you must obtain results I am decided before the end of the month: we have 19 useful days. It is therefore positive that the action must continue.

How it must continue? It is technical problem and therefore I do not penetrate myself in such issue. I observe but that the ridge of hill 1308 is not land for infantry. It is moreover from wondering if the attack of a division can really gives the possession to us of such ridge and if the necessary sacrifice is not excessive.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Geloso: the land is difficult also in the directions previewed from the plan.

M.: There are therefore three ways to try the solution of the problem: to occupy hill 1308 of the Trebeshines; to act for the bottom valley; to act along the ridge of the Mali. The best solution appears but always the second one.

G.: The occupation of hill 1308 would have the advantage to free in order always Tepeleni.

M.: But also occupying hill 1308 would remain the rest of the Trebeshines, that have height towards 1900 m., in hand to the Greeks. Which are the reasons for which the divisions they do not go ahead?

G.: The difficult land; the enemy who strikes itself and is very organized on the land. From ours side the lack of training, especially in the officials.

.....

M.: It is necessary to insist absolutely. After four days it cannot be changed operations plan. It must neutralize hill 1308 and its eastern slopes and to go with the attacking columns. It must that on hill 1308 fall hundred and hundred of projectiles of artillery and bombs of airplane. The airplane must fly low and not too much high, also at the cost to lose some.

It must attack tomorrow, since various the troop will begin to take root on the land and to believe that the action is ended. The Greeks must be held all the day under our fire. The antidote of the mortar is the speed of the movement.

It is absolutely necessary to insist on the guiding ones previewed from the plan. It is absolutely necessary a military victory for the prestige of the Italian Army before the end of the month. I have always made of all in order holding high the name and the prestige of the Italian Army, but now it is absolutely necessary to smash in.

I have said to his Exc. Guzzoni that send here all the ammunitions that are in Italy, because the Italian Army is here, the war it makes is here and it is here that it must gain⁽¹⁷⁾.

Then Mussolini called Gen. Pricolo and prescribed it to employ all aviation available, for all the following day, so as to facilitate a better the offensive: "*aviation must uncouple on hill 1308 at least 1500 bombs and must take part all the aircraft, including "divebombers" "*. Action taken Pricolo and assured that a stormo would have gone to bomb Chiaf Sofiut and the rest hill 1308. Duration of the bombing six hours: from 09:00 to 11:00 and 14:00 to 18:00.

On the issue of ammunitions there was something on which Mussalini passes over, but that measure would have had worrying in sum. Gen. Guzzoni was returned on the subject with decidedly alarming personal memorandum:

17) Cavallero diary, date 12.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"General Staff has specified in the attached sheet the known deficit situation of the munitions, that turns out truly serious. Such deficit situation does not derive from insufficient productive ability to the industry, but from insufficient feeding of raw materials, although that the allocation granted to the Army is in the maximum measure destined to the ammunition preparation (...)"⁽¹⁸⁾

At the same time Gen. Roatta had informed the Comando Superiore to have sped up the shipment to Albania of the 3 unfoc already previewed for the month of March and to have moreover disposed, as per demand, extraordinary the urgent shipment of the following munitions for all the arms employed in Albania:

- 126,000 rounds of 75/13, par to approximately 1 unfoc;
- 86,000 rounds of 75/18, par to approximately 3.3 unfoc;
- 100,000 rounds of 100/17, par to approximately 1.8 unfoc;
- 50,000 rounds of 105/28, par to approximately 4 unfoc;
- 40,000 rounds of 149/13, par to approximately 3.7 unfoc;
- 20,000 rounds of 149/35, par to approximately 4 unfoc.

But also it had perceived that, being exhausted the availabilities of the depots, for the shipment of these last ammunitions in all probability would have been necessary to reach, at least in part, to the equipments of unit and of the cover: *"If the rhythm of the consumptions - it had added - where they to maintain themselves high and to prolong in the time, would be impassible alimentary the action"*.

The afternoon of the 13th the VIII Corps renewed its efforts with the divisions *Cagliari*, *Bari* and *Pinerolo*. The breach feature this time was comprised between Bregu Rapit and the Proj Math - approximately a forehead kilometer - and the task to operate the rubble and to push the penetration until to Hani Vinocasit were entrusted to *Bari*, commanded now by Gen. Angioj. At the same time the *Cagliari* and the *Pinerolo* had to engage in depth the enemy in the respective, field in order to trick it on the point in which it agreed to exercise the breakthrough. In second the lines the *Siena*. The operations order was illustrated to Mussolini, reached early after noon the observatory of the VIII Corps after to be passed from the command, of IV the Corps, Gen. Gambara which it emphasized the accuracy of the artillery preparation:

¹⁸⁾ DSCS, Memorandum dated 11.3.1941, with attached f. 434/Segr. dated 10.3.1.941 of the S.M.R.E.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

300 gun tubes in charge to create a mobile curtain in front to the infantries advance.

Mussolini was pleased and telephoned to Cavallero, than it had been carried to the observatory of *Bari* in order to follow near the action:

"They are at observatory and I have read the document of Gambarà. Very precise and exhausting. The division commanders do not have that to apply it.

Today it must assault and smash in. Tell Negro that I estimate a lot and account on him. Tell him that more is impulses, less is the losses"⁽¹⁹⁾.

The new attempt strongly was supported from aviation, than from 14:15 to 17:30 the Trebeshines covered by bombs, and from all the artillery available of the VIII and the XXV Corps in a position to fire on objectives. In the region of the Mali and that one of the Arze the infantries of the IV Corps and the *Sforzesca* tried to pin enemy in order to avoid that was dissuading forces to favor of the more engaged field. But once again the success did not smiled on to the VIII Corps. The *Bari* squandered in vain at Monastero, in vain the 140th infantry left on the field, in an onslaught, its commander, Col. Biasutti. In vain the *Cagliari* succeeded twice to occupy Bregu Rapit: both the times a violent reaction driven out on the line of departure. Uselessly the *Pinerolo*, which the 13th infantry lost the commander, Col. Franceschetti, tried to facilitate the advance of the *Bari*. Cavallero went near the Commanders of the divisions in the first formation in order to become personally account of as the things went. The *Cagliari* had had approximately 500 men loss for every regiment and the units were a little disheartened not being resolutions that to approach itself the Greek positions, without being able some to conquer them. The commander of the division artillery declared that with the bores available little possibilities existed to open the road to the infantry: "*we have made preparation from war movement on a consisting systemizing*". Also Gen. De Stefanis Agreed: the aviation and artillery preparation had obtained little⁽²⁰⁾. Progressing of the *Pinerolo* however,

19) Cavallero diary, date 13.3.1941.

20) For the truth, the artillery fire was not successful to open the road to the infantries, but it had caused much serious damages to the adversary. Gen. Bakos, commander of the II Corps, with the circ. E.P. 3058 circulated in date 27 March at the end of the battle, in urging its divisions to a better systemizing of the land specified: "*Need to confess that in this field we have not made that that the situation imposed on us, but receive with giving up the deadly blows of the artilleries and mortars of the enemy, in this period of stasis. Every day, the news from the G. U. give news of the most serious losses in officers and soldiers due to the blows of the artillery and mortars and a lot often the number of these losses exceeds those endured in combat (...)*".

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

to his warning, it depended on the event on the crest of Monastero, since from Chiaf Lusit did not think of being able to pass.

To north the IV Corps was in phase of reorders. Gen. Mercalli had modified the device, passing the 11th alpine and the 105th cc.nn. legion to the dependencies of the *Pusteria*, whose commander was sped up to retake of the Spadarit, bloody taken and then lost for a complex of negative circumstances. The distribution of the order remained but without continuation, because the counter-offensive was suspended. On the historical diary of the army corps it was written: *"the begun action the 9 c.m., also not having obtained the previewed successes, can consider closed by now"*. The army corps had brought back altogether 16,400 losses, of which 72 dead or wounded officers.

That morning of 14 March Mussolini had had a talk with Cavallero and tracing a horizon turn a little bitter:

"The Duce begin telling me that the king of Greece has said to the Hungarian military attaché who has won without to strike the Italian army and that he does not see the hour to finish to cause the serious losses. Passing then to the operating issue he says to me that it has stated that the effect of the operation is insufficient, also being itself rendered account of the impulse and the spirit of sacrifice of the troops and especially of the Bari. To his question I have said to him that honestly I think that our units are not suitable to produce a breach of the enemy front who has taken advantage of the time that we employed to form the front in order to make a very efficient defensive system. To a well basted defensive action with fire direction centers, it is necessary a troop that it knows to make infiltration tactics and that has organization of officers strongly. We do not have these conditions and therefore instead making infiltration tactics act of weight and wear away the enemy.

The Duce has asked me if effectively we wear away and I have answered to he that how much has said the King of Greece the test. Moreover we have news of regiments dissolving, of flags sent to Athens and that are regiments reduced to a single battalion. Then I have said an ascertainment that I have always made during the great war and that is that who attacks loses 3, while who defends himself loses 2. The Duce has objected that before the Greeks have always attacked they and I have answered to it that same it, in the first talk of Bisceglie, has said that to that at the time the Greeks had 9,000 died and 30,000 wounded on the front to ours 5,000 died and 20,000 wounded. Therefore the proportion returns. Moreover, since we had taken 6,000 prisoners we were in advantage.

Returning to the operation in course, I have said to the Duce that if between today and tomorrow we see that one breaks at the bottom we can continue the action with the maximum intensity. If instead we see that a breakthrough is not outlined we must reflect. The Duce has asked to me: "and then". I have answered that in this case I would count to still employ the *Siena*, but if then is not outlined the success does not have to continue to feeding the fight, but to suspend it,

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

to save the *Piemonte* and to reorder the *Puglie* and the *Pinerolo* for the successive resumption.

My concept would be: to act in the Vojuşa valley on the front of the Tepeleni in order to re-establish the situation that is a small modification to our disadvantage after the enemy attacks of days 7, 8 and 9 and following. For this I have authorized Geloso to employ the *Lupi*. It would have therefore two fields, one to south and one to north. Astride of the Vojuşa proving some stirring mountain battalion with the infantry battalions, that is very useful to render the company more solid, even if in this case too much are not respected the organic requirements.

On the front of the Vojuşa an action must be made and at the same time pressure from north must be made on the front of the VIII army corps, so that the enemy does not have the feeling that we have abandoned the offensive in that field.

But in equal time we will have to act to bottom in other field. The field is that one of Golem-Suşiça, where a already ready plan can be resumed in examination and the organization already is made. Such action can be made at the end of the month. Gave at once to the C.A. of Messe the order to make to enter online *Acqui* ⁽²¹⁾ in Suşiça valley and to re-unite to the *Cuneo* the two Bns of Suşiça valley. It will make at once contact with the XXV Corps in order to replace to point the program of the action of the Brennero, than in this case I reinforce with another division.

Tomorrow evening, based on the outcome of the operations of the VIII Corps, he (Mussolini) will be able to take its decisions. I have asked the Duce not to speak with some about this our understanding. The Duce has called this action from Valona: *operation of 3 January* ". ⁽²²⁾

It must be said openly that the operating perspective new cannot not leave forbidden. It succeeds difficult to comprise like Gen. Cavallero that knew well, therefore as it had demonstrated to know, the causes first of our failures - general training unpreparedness, organic deficiencies, deficiency of modern artillery, unexpected organization - could of point in the clear to want to open a new field of fight in a feature of the front to the southern extremity of the 11th Armed and without appreciable developments, and for more with troops that well-known were not in a position to passing abruptly from a defensive, still characterized from one, sensitive intermingling of units, to the offensive. In the Cavallero afternoon the head called operations section, Lt. Col. Fornara, and fixed in a memorandum for Mussolini already the orally exposed considerations in the conversation of the morning. Therefore it said it to give run to two

21) At 17:15 Cavallero telephoned Messe ask the 18th infantry if were ready, "*Answer negative, lack 1,200 men*" (Cavallero Diary).

22) Cavallero Diary, talk 09:30 hours of 14 March.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

studies: an action in Sushiqs: a valley with the divisions *Acqui* and *Siena*, a "*blow of the flank*" in the field of the *Cagliari*, specifying that "*assembly of the operation 3 January must be rapid*". Then he telephoned Gen. Messe and, without ambiguity, ordered it to begin to put online, of *Acqui*, what it had: "*it must that alignment is made to very soon... I will make to send from Tirana all that that is necessary. Movement express but ordered. Time: 8-10 days*". Half hour after, examinee the situation with Col. Scattini, head of the office information, admitted: "*Our deficiencies: leaders; instruction; it cannot be passed of blow from the defensive to offensive*"⁽²³⁾.

A time of arrest for the counter-offensive languish was prevailed. Considered the condition of the VIII Corps, at 21:30 Mussolini determined the pause and soon after Gen. Geloso communicated to the Army Corps that the state of fact determined from the combats of those days induced to reconsider the operational understandings with the vision of a immense offensive resumption and decisive capacity; therefore, in the attended phase of that it was opened, it was necessary to give impulse to every activity to tending improve the acquired positions and the outlets from their possibility. The losses of the VIII Corps in the six days of battle were of 300 officials and 7,600 non-commissioned officers and soldiers, par to 13% of the total force of the army corps (approximately 60,000 men) but to 29% with the troops more directly engaged in the fight (Infantry and artillerymen).

On 15 March, at post 34 of Devoli, Mussolini held a meeting of generals Cavallero, Geloso, Cambara, present the heads of the operations section and information of the Comando Superiore. At first he read and he commented documents informed on the enemy, in strategic political and tactical field, then Cavallero said:

Cavallero: The Duce has decided to interrupt the action for three days, during which it must be observed how the enemy reacts. It is necessary tenacity. We have had in order to make the headway, we will have it now for persevere. Therefore: rearrangement, pressure, then will come the flank. While it is necessary to watch the front of Tepeleni well. From 7 March and after we have had on this front a true battle, in which we have held very well and inflicted serious losses to the enemy, but with some loss of land from our part.

Continuing now in the defensive attitude, we run the risk to lose the valley of Mezgorani, that would be serious. Just the *Lupi* with active task has been therefore moved online. It must have present who the enemy has in all probability not abandoned the offensive idea. It imposes

23) Cavallero diary, date 14.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

to act. Now, the land margins around to Tepeleni are very narrow. It is necessary therefore:

- to continue the action on the front of the IV and VIII C. d'A.;
- to ignite the action on the front of Tepeleni, being removed the initiative to the enemy, from the Arze to the Golico, and proposing themselves for first objective to cut off the salient of the Shendeli (...).

Wanting now to consider also the disproved hypothesis that the action of breakthrough on the front of the VIII C.A. did not succeed, places the question if effort in order to break the enemy front in other direction does not convene to preview. This could be searched on the forehead of Valona, where already exists an organization foundation. In such case, the objective could be the line of Port Palermo, to reach with convergent action from Saliari valley on Golemi and Sushica valley on Kuçi. For that to make they would be necessary, in adding to the units online in said fields: one division for the field of Saliari and one for that one of the Sushica.

The choice of this direction, at least in potential sense, would answer also to the usefulness of having in every moment of the fresh forces to capacity of Tepeleni. Therefore the actions would be comprised in an only picture:

- IV and VIII army corps;
- Tepeleni sector;
- sector of Valona (eventually to prepare itself, being necessary, for end of month".

This time the proposal to launch an offensive on the shoreline was formal, but Mussolini, than evidently had rethought the issue, cut short:

"We have in action an effort that engages the IV, VIII, and XXV C A. Such effort answers to the concept to make wearing down the war, in how much we act here in correspondence of the enemy *strength*, and to offer possibility to us of at least tactical success. Of other part the only zone, on the front of the 11th Army, where our success can have a name is that one of Klisura. If we reach this objective, the downfall of Greek moral will be had. It objects are, therefore:

- to hold Tepeleni at all costs;
- to reach Klisura at all costs.

The operation on the front of Valona would be today expensive, much more than the enemy defense has increased, and would impose a advanced effort to that one previewed in past; therefore we can dispense considering it and be maintained therefore on the defense.

We have made the wall that Gen. Cavallero is successful to constitute; we have chosen a direction, convinced that the day that he knew that we have conquered Klisura the Greek army will collapse. Creed that by now the Greeks have renounced to the two extreme sectors of Korça and Valona. It is necessary to engage them on the binomial Klisura- Tepeleni. The situation of Tepeleni is precarious. But Tepeleni is defended also acting on Klisura. Therefore: *to insist on the action*

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Klisura-Tepeleni and to concentrate all on the IV, VIII and XXV C.A. (...).

As far as the forces available, on the front of the VIII C.A., remains therefore online: *Bari, Cagliari and Pinerolo*. They are to move: *Siena, Puglie* and *Piemonte*. They are in arrival, as reserve of the Comando Superiore: *Casale* and *Firenze* (...).

Cavallero did not insist on his plan, but asked if, in connection with the attitude Yugoslavia, provisions had to be taken to the Albanian - Yugoslavian frontier. A question that could be avoided. First of all because Cavallero had the competence and the authority to judge and to decide from if, in quality of Chief of the General Staff and of Comandante Superiore the Armed Forces in Albania; in the second place because the experience had luminous demonstrated which confidence - and which guarantee - it could be attributed to the political assurances. In fact Mussolini Decreed: "(...) *the Yugoslavia will end in order to come to the fold. In Albania having nothing to do with the security of alignment. The Yugoslavia in fact will not try anything in Albania. It will be enough, therefore, to hold in order the Guard to the Frontier, the R. Guardia di Finanza and the Carabinieri*".⁽²⁴⁾

3. THE PAUSE AFTER THE OFFENSIVE.

The disappointment of Mussolini had to be transparent and, for how much it does not turn out that still he had formulated comments denied, sure Cavallero perceived the dumb reproach. Therefore the speed up operating guiding new search can only be explained without more ties or connection with the plans reasoned and marked the rhythm in the weather aiming to put into effect the offensive sighed one in the Korçano. After the proposal of the "operation 3 January" - proposed, noticed, abandoned without neither an attempt of demonstration of his usefulness and reliability to one simple phrase of Mussolini well: "... *the operation on the front of Valona would be today expensive, much more than the enemy his defense has increased, and would impose a effort advanced to that one previewed in past; therefore we can dispense considering it and be maintained on the defensive*" -, the morning of the 16th Cavallero ordered to the Lieutenant Colonel Fornara to study the features of a offensive to deliver in the sector of the IV Corps with removed mountain troops to the 9th Army, previous to the substitution with unit of infantry of the 11th Army or the

24) Cavallero diary, date 15.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of next arrival, therefore went from Mussolini to submit the plan:

"11:00 hours, I conferred with the Duce with respect to the new provisions for that is giving to the action the maximum effectiveness and: artillery preparation; new directions of breakthrough; adaptation of the command. To this purpose I would propose to directly take the field of the IV and VIII C.A., leaving to Geloso the command of the XXV and Special C.A. Therefore the action of the Scindeli - Tepeleni would be entrusted to Geloso. The Duce answers that at the time he had noticed that the currently Army sector is too much large for a single Commander and that had thought to put a new Command to the center.

Therefore he approves. I say also that I have in mind to study the practicability in the sector of the IV and that for this purpose I send an official {Mellano}"⁽²⁵⁾.

The reasons do not appear clear of having made to fall the choice of the new direction on the Mali, end discard a priori for the length of the ridge here and the logistic difficulties, are of the directed assumption of command of the IV and VIII army corps. This last idea, above all, does not find valid justification. How he could seriously want at the same time to exercise the three assignments of, Chief of the General Staff, Comandante Superiore of the Armed Forces in Albania and commander of an army? And as it could be thought to constitute a Army without Commander, services, troops of support? or to organize in a dozen of days, how many lacked to the end of the month, the frame of a new Army, are also - probably - to determined time? Since it is not possible to think that Gen. Cavallero did not notice, for first, of the extremely debatable aspects of the proposal, has been induced to attribute his attitude to desire to redeem of person, in front of the eyes of Mussolini, the success lacked.

In any case, obtained the *placet*, Cavallero was put to the work on three points: to find mountain troops, to study the sector of the IV Corps well and to delineate the new center Command. We say endured that this last argument fell after some day⁽²⁶⁾, that he tried how much little solid bases. The issue of the formation of a mass of mountain troops was rather complex and obviously a provision of the sort, in favor of an attempt on the Mali, meant

25) Cavallero diary, date 16.3.1941.

26) The afternoon of the 19th Cavallero accompanied Mussolini to post 45: "During the re-examine covered with the Duce the issue of the constitution of a new Command to the center and we remain of understanding to suspend the thing" (Cavallero Diary).

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

that in the mind of Cavallero it had been abandoned every intention to put into effect the relative design to the great offensive in the field of the 9th Army. He was dealing with to withdraw from the line at least a mountain division and to such goal they were convened Generals *Pirzio*, *Biroli* and *Nasci*. Cavallero began by summarizing the last events and informing of the decisions of Mussolini: to realize success in order to demonstrate to the world the Italian superiority over the Greeks. Since the times turned out locked, in how much for first of April were previewed them the entrance in field of the Germans, did not appear acceptable different guiding efforts long from that one of the Deshnicës valley. After all, the concept was of cut off the salient of the Shendeli with the XXV Corps and continuing the action in the sector of Berat with the VIII and IV Army Corps, this last one due reinforcements.

"I add - Cavallero continued - than if we do not employ the Alpine will not be able to succeed. The artillery preparations go very well, but then solid units are necessary. Those of infantry are solid morally, but they do not give to the point of view training and employment and therefore or they are arrested at 300 meters from the objective or, if they reach a position, they do not maintain it. Very various they are the troops of the XXVI Corps, that they hold the possession of that they take.

Now, Mercalli has taken the Spadarit but then he has lost it. (Pirzio Biroli objects he had the *Pusteria* but I make present it that it was tired). I conclude: it must make to come mountain troops otherwise does not gain the war, less than the Greeks they let go. Therefore I have thought to replace the *Tridentina* with a good division of infantry, equipped (of other part the season well goes improving); moreover you would give to battalions or dissolve regiments.

The *Tridentina* would act on the Mali with the 11th alpine to which we will give organic complements. At the time: before the month. And decided: the salvation of the Country demands it".⁽²⁷⁾

Naturally Gen. Nasci raised objections: the *Tridentina* with seven battalions trained well held a sector of 15 kilometers, on whose main position, the Guri i Topit, the temperature came down to -27°. The front to it found the Greek 11th Inf. Div., which it was very contained, but if it had smashed in, what that could happen with troops of infantry not trained to operate to those altitudes, would have taken of back the serious *Cuneense* and given trouble also to the *Pusteria*. Finally, after along examination it was concluded "to propose to the Duce to take 9th Army to the Cuneense less a share that

57) Cavallero Diary, date 16.3.1941

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

baggage train in exchange of the Piemonte and a bersaglieres regiment ".⁽²⁸⁾ Indeed the three commanders went to Mussolini and showed him the various aspects of the issue.

Mussolini consented and decided to make to come from Italy another division of infantry, the *Cosseria*, for the 9th Army. As it is seen, in the turn of a week Mussolini had established the arrival in Albania of another three divisions: the *Casale* (already in course of disembarkation), *Firenze* and *Cosseria* the; major unit that the Comandante Superiore had not asked, of in forecast of the counter-offensive until now. Once again the personal relationship is not comprised elapsing between Cavallero and Mussolini. The questions there are many: since not to make such divisions come *before* the counter-offensive and according to this, avoiding therefore to face the enemy with a clearly inadequate force ratio? why not to ask instead, to parity of affluent force, plentiful complements for the divisions in place, than very rarely had exceeded the 75-80% of the organic ones? why not to ask at least one new mountain division (the *Taurinense*, as an example) in order to reach with safety a true alpine mass? Undoubtedly some answer exists, however it does not appear of the all convincing: "*the Duce would was disposed to make to come other units of Italy – he had said Cavallero at Pirzio Biroli - but I do not want. I have need to hold available the transports for rations and ammunitions "*. And then because not opposed to the arrival of the *Cosseria*? The counter-offensive had been delivered as soon as possible in order to avoid the ulterior strengthening of the Greek defensive line, and then because to want to probably resume it nearly at once with forces more worn away than those adversaries ("*who attacks loses three, while who defends itself loses two*")⁽²⁹⁾? It is also true that would have been available the *Casale* and perhaps *Firenze*, but which confidence could they supply, when it was well-known that the divisions introduce in the fight as soon as disembarked very rarely had given good test? It must therefore more and more think that Cavallero has been found, legacy from the optimism manifested to Mussolini, of whose be of mind account became very, and consequently has hesitated to ask reinforces that at least they would have denounced inaccuracy of calculations.

28) The *Cuneense* was deployed in the sector of the XXVI Corps, but the 2nd alpine and the *Pinerolo* group were to the dependencies of the special Army corps (11th Army).

29) The *Puglie*, as an example, had lost in the supported combats the 30-40% of the arms of the units.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Sure is that the action of command in this period revealed uncertainties. Of it they make faith some episodes that it is difficult to accept, which: evident desire to attack however, also to attack; the highly summarized introduced choice of the operating guiding to the approval of Mussolini, that with a simple glance on the paper rejected, without to find objections, or approved of; the movement of divisions subordinate to the consent of Mussolini; persevere of the breakup of the great and small units, in spite of all the disapproval and of all the circulars: the *Piemonte*, as an example, had to be used in the field of the 11th Army like "infantry battalions", and for the groups of artillery of greater bore the Solomonic subdivision between the army corps or quite between the armies was becoming normal; the acceptance of new units of the military service, whereas would have been much profitable battalions of complements. It had been ventilated the eventuality to replace the *Piemonte* in the field of the 9th Army with a legion with the G.I.L.; a grouping of forest militia came, on the training level of which it was more than lawful to nourish heavy doubts.

Returning to the problem of the recovery of the *Cuneense*, Cavallero had a talk also with Gen. Geloso, which he communicated to have exchanged to send the group "Pizzi", revived from at least 1,200 men drawn from the complements of the *Pusteria*, to the special army corps in order to free the 2nd alpine, located in the Sushica valley, Geloso did not lack to observe that the group was already very oriented in the zone of Tepeleni and that belonged to the *Julia*, which of would be remained impoverished, but the guideline remained.

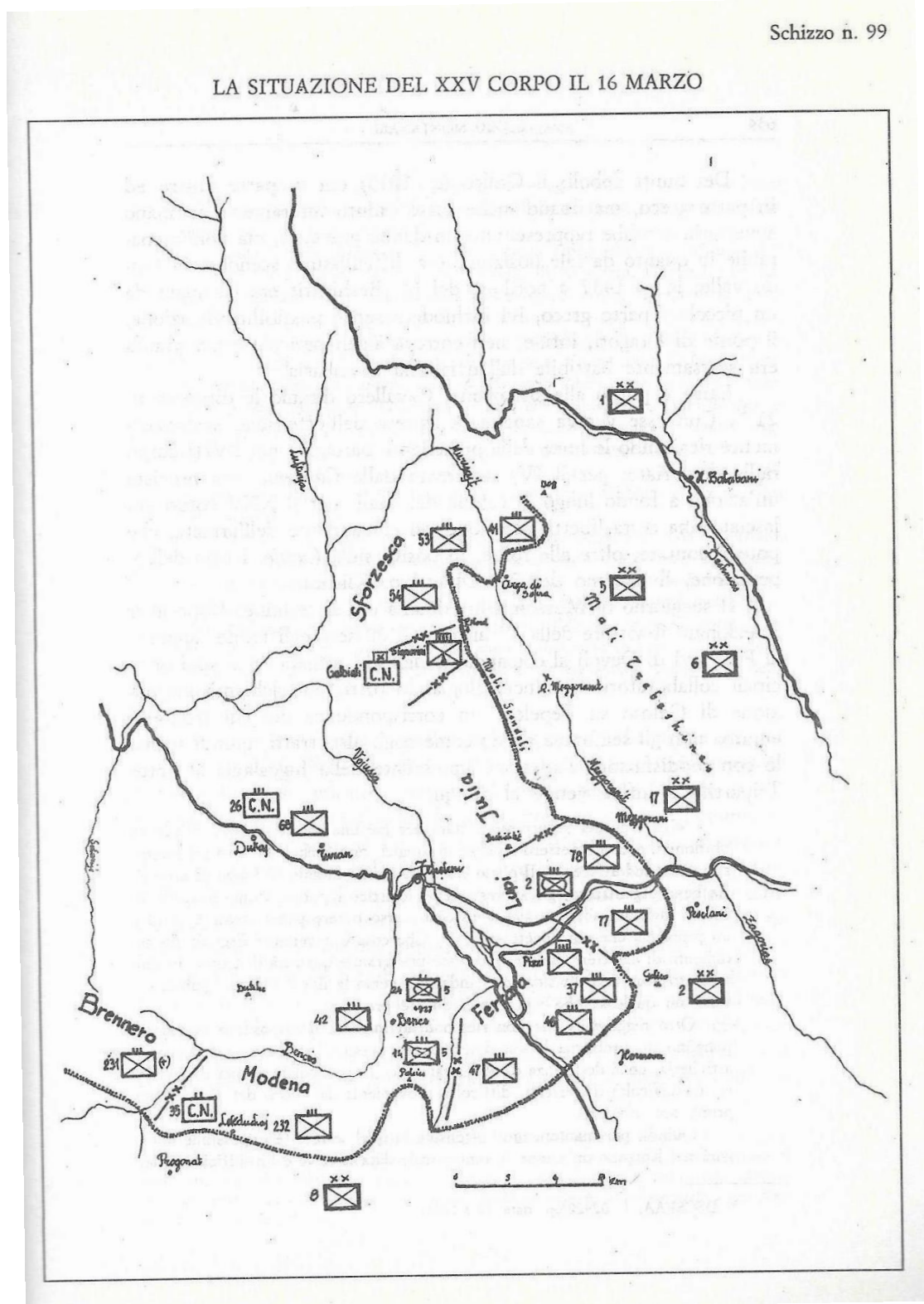
While these contacts had place, two officials of the operations section of the Armed forces high command, Maj. Mellano and Maj. Peraldo, was brings respective near the Commanders of the IV and the VIII Corps. Gen. Mercalli received with favor the idea to receive a second mountain division, much to express confidence in a long operation the ridge of the Mali, and emphasized that the key of the success resided in the Spadarit. The mount opened the road on Chiaf Sofiut and its possession was decisive for the conquest of Bregu Gliulei, vice versa this last one in Italian hand remained neutralized from the Spadarit as long as held from the Greeks.

Gen. Rossi, for his part, declared sure the total situation of the army corps. He had reordered himself and with the insertion of the *Lupi di Toscana* he had constituted a reserve, a little fragmentary but also always a reserve (sketch n. 99).

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 633

The situation with the XXV Army Corps on 16 March



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Of the weak points: Golico (hill 1615) was in part ours and Greek part, but when also it had fallen entire in opposing hand would have represented a serious danger, yes, but not irreparable in how much from such position it was most difficult to come down in the valley; hill 1437 to the northeast of the M. Beshishtit were occupied from a small Greek unit, thereby nailed without action possibility; the bridge of Dragoti, finally, did not run some danger and for moreover it was insufficient beatable from the opposing artillery.

Made the point to the situation, Cavallero circulated the directives n. 21⁽³⁰⁾. With the resumption of the offensive came sanctioned, substantially tracing the lines of the previous battle: for the VIII Corps nothing varied; for the IV, reinforced from the *Cuneense*, the chain of the Mali was previewed an action along the bottom; for the XXV Corps a sure freedom of action of the commander of the army, that it could count, beyond the forces was left, in place, on the *Casale*. Beginning of the operation, the morning of the 28th. Objective: Klisura.

The stay of Mussolini in Albania was at an end. After to have inspected the sector of the 9th Army, on the evening of the 20th he held a meeting at post 34 of Devoli to the commander of the 11th Army and to its main collaborators. It began praising all, then drew the attention of Geloso on Tepeleni, in correspondence of whose front the "wall" it did not seem solid as in the others features, therefore signaled with satisfaction the imminent adhesion of the Yugoslavia to the Tripartite Pact and finally he came to therefore:

"The action of the 9th current has been for me a surprise. I did not make illusions that they were obtained strategic success; I did not exclude but satisfactory tactical success. The plan in fact was very studied; the well organized fire of artillery; the logistic preparations to point. How it has happened that the divisions have had therefore a insufficient to be able penetrate? This is a problem that you must study. Which thing has success? I exclude a yielding of moral character. I have seen a great amount of troops in motion; I have seen divisions that they went towards the line: optimal. Therefore he has been a something that technical you must specify.

Eight regiments that do not succeed to record the opposing device place a problem whose determining they can consist in the artillery fire, in the deficiency of training, particular technical see again, in land difficulty, coming from difficulties from the fire of the Trebeshines before not previewed.

Therefore, also maintaining the offensive in that field (it is impossible to tackle in the Korçano an action in useful time given to the snow and the insufficiency of the

30) DSCSFAA, f. 02920/op. dated 19.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

alpine mass; so that the 9th Army it must only act in case of opposing collapse) they will have seen again the causes of the lacked penetration the first phase to put their remedy.

Approximately the date, the Germans have made to know us that they will attack in the first days of April, giving us a warning of six days. And therefore necessary that we give a blow to the Greeks at all costs; otherwise the history will say that one small nation which Greece has not succeeded to strike Italy, but will say also that Italy has not succeeded to defeat Greece. It is in game here the military prestige of the Italian nation. Before that the Germans fire the first shot is necessary to have inflicted one defeat to the Greeks. The Italian people would rebel themselves to the idea that its army has not known to strike that Greek. All that would not have been possible in past; today there are masses of men and there is a complete organization for the life works. This you must make to feel to all and to make yes that the battle that will begin at the end of the month has success. The Greeks must be rejected and are chased.

Returning to the action of 9 March, he goes to re-examine during land, tactics of infantry, fire of artillery, collaboration between infantry and artillery, tactical collaboration with aviation. To this last famous purpose that they give aviation in tactical field does not have to await spectacular results. It can only act in this field when the adversary is in route. That does not have to be asked that cannot give. That on which I insist is the collaboration between infantry and artillery. The artillery must be to disposition of the infantry who is advancing (...).

Deserves convenient prominence three observations. First: *"As it has happened that the divisions have had therefore a insufficient one to be able penetrate?"* The answer was only one: when, after alternate vicissitudes, an offensive catches up a prefixed scope partially but not the objective, or the other does not achieve neither one nor the other, the fact as war event can also be considered that re-enters in the negative probabilities of the operation; but when it does not succeed not to take signify impetus that it has been error, and serious, during appraisal of the terms of the operating problem. Mussolini did not want to remember the promises of victory explicitly, but he could make it, in how much is also true that without its nagging insistence a lot would probably not be been born the idea of the counter-offensive in Deshnicës valley, however nobody, in some way, the manifesto disable doubt on resolution⁽³¹⁾. However it held to indicate: *"... it has been a something*

31) With Gen. Pricolo, Mussolini released feelings much in heavier way: *"I have recalled - he said - because I have decided to return tomorrow same to Rome. They are nauseate of this atmosphere. We have not progressed of a step: they have tricked me until today. Depreciation deeply all this people. Last night I have sent a detailed report to his Maestà"* (PRICOLO, op. cit., page 345).

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

that technical you must specify ". Second observation: "... *maintaining the offensive in that field (...) because of the lack of penetration in the first phase to set down a remedy will have be see again*". Now the causes of the setback - on which it will return itself - were known and it very knew some that they could not themselves be eliminated, to short of to short expiration. Therefore ordering the retort constituted superficiality of views and assumption of precise responsibilities. Naturally, the opposition with the due energy to similar order did not extend the responsibilities. The message of a heroism returns to the mind regiment commander, Col. De Renzi, which, engaged with a column in the action carried out from the *Pinerolo* on 25 January in the sector of Chiaf Chiciocut, he communicated the Commander of the division: "(...) *Offensive for Suka objective in such conditions are a chimera stop I will make instead possible in order to retake tomorrow important position Bregu Rapit being my must proportion objectives to means, not being able proportion means to objects (...)*". Third relief: "... *from aviation in tactical field it does not have to await spectacular results. It can only act in this field when the adversary is in route* ". Like vision of the modern war, especially after the demonstrations supplied from the Germans, cannot be said that the Supreme Commander of the operating troops was to the height of the times.

The report for Mussolini then continued on what it appeared possible to make in the resumption of the operation, holding present the probability that on 6 April the⁽³²⁾ Germanic troops burst into Greece. Cavallero synthesized the alignment of the new attack: action in depth in the sector of Berat (IV Corps), with a mass of ten mountain battalions (*Cuneense*, 11th alpine and *Intra* Bn.) started along the Mali, and with the VIII Corps in charge to break towards the valley according to the previous design; to maintain at the same time lives the action in correspondence of the sector of Tepeleni with the XXV Corps. Gen. Geloso was explicit: it thought the advance of the alpine units profitable on the ridge of the Mali, but it did not think that it could provoke a yielding in the valley bottom before catching up, at least, the Topojanit, is worth to say to arrive to the height of Suka, that solitary penetration involved one

32) the 16th Gen. Magli - transferred the Comando Supremo, after to have left the *Centauro* to Gen. Pizzolato - it had known from Gen. von Rintelen that "*first of April*" the Germans they would have begun the offensive against Greece and would have wished that, in cooperation with that German, it came delivered the Italian offensive from the sector of the 9th Army. In the report, Mussolini finally in order to indicate the "*probability*" that the D day was the *6 April*, without that anything was authorized similar deduction.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of fifteen or so kilometers online of air, with a route of supply constituted from an only mule track on the crest. Moreover it did not notice some possibility for the action from Chiaf Chiciocut before that it came removed of means the northern Trebeshines, against which it would have seen to operate the division of right of the VIII Corps on hill 1308, the *Legnano* on Arza di Sopra and the *Julia* on the Chiaf Mezgoranit- Trebeshines. The two interested commanders of army corps took part to they turn. Gen. Gambara said at once that, to his warning, on the Trebeshines there was little to be obtained: *"we have already tried once without to make a step. With the infantries who we have not we will never put foot. From Murizaj also to more we will arrive to Arza di Sopra, beyond which it will be very difficult to continue. Still they are convinced that the better direction is that previous one "*. Gen. Rossi admitted the possibility to act with *Legnano* and *Julia*: substantial impediments did not exist.

To this point, finding unanimity of views and always turning out themselves in argument the three critical points us - length of the direction of the Mali, difficulty of outlet in Deshnicës valley and elimination of hill 1308 - it was not dealt to conclude and concluded Mussolini: *"Given that will have to study some technical procedure in order to realize the surprise"*. After that passed a series of phrases to effect:

"(...) Need that all know that the greatest decision and the maximum energy are prevailed... Nobody adages on the conviction that the Greek depression and the German forces liquidate the matter... Here it is in game the military honor of the nation... To the soldier we must always give the feeling that we are victorious; when he does not withdraw himself the soldier must always consider itself victorious ".

Cavallero allowed to leave the Duce and he recovered to the work. Circular, addressed to Geloso had already circulated, on the criteria and the modalities of attack to observe in the course of the battle, drawing the experience from the first phase, but the commander of the 11th Army of it did not have sure need: also he, like all, was itself shrewd that the hurting point was the tactical ungluing between fire and movement. The picture was that one always, what five months before it had been seen at Kalibaki. The escape of the infantries from the lines of departure happened by impulse: without to employ the own arms of unit the battalions ahead throw themselves, but the release was not harmonized with the lengthening of the shooting of preparation completed in support, so that, while meters came exceed the first 50-60, the advanced enemy elements,

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

not more subjects at shooting of the artillery, re-occupy their places and with the fire of the automatic arms were soon in degree to arrest the onslaught, whose formations after a few minutes fell under torment of the opposing placed mortars under cover. The demands for fire to the artillery began then, but this in kind could not take part, also because often the objectives were not characterized with precision from the O.C. patrols, little practical or located insufficient in suitable positions to the performance of the particular task. Of other part, the infantry, than of usual attacked frontally with a tangentially linear alignment, did not pronounce some infiltration, did not succeed to be useful for some yielding of the enemy, than also here and here it was revealed. Worse still, it did not know to employ the unit arms, to the point that had been even ventilated to remove to the rifle companies' one of the two guns machines, in how much in assault phase the fire of this arm was not taken advantage of. The few machine-guns were not trained to the shooting in the intervals and over said friends troops. The 45 mm. mortars, in which nobody had confidence, were used badly, uncovered, and therefore quickly it characterized and struck. The 81 mm mortars much too little is known and they never came employed in mass; however one has seen as the companies mortars of the old divisions, quickly disappeared during the withdraw, had been begun to reconstitute to the better one in January.

No action of smoke of blinding of the enemy observatories, than also dominated to all the origins of the attack, had been tried. No prosecution of the effort during the nocturnal hours, but rare exceptions, when was ordered. With respect to the first subject, the availability of smoke-producing projectiles in the warehouses of Intendancy minimal and was limited to the supply for howitzers of 100 mm., while he would have been preferable to have some for the 81 mm mortars and 75/13 guns. To part this limitation, but, existed much hesitation to make resorted to the smoke-producing projectiles, fearing that the adversary could pick the occasion in order to accuse Italy of employment of toxic means. Such hesitation, than had been translate in verbalize the directives, found an explicit reply in an order of Gen. Guzzoni to the S.M.R.E.: *"To confirmation of the dispositions orally given makes prohibition to employ on the Greek front not only phosphorus projectiles (smoke-producing, incendiary), but also those simply smoke-producing."*⁽³³⁾

33) DSCS, f. 1919/Serv. dated 29.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

But, Cavallero, could reply with a message directed to Mussolini:

"In the second local action carried out yesterday on left the ninth army, the enemy has employed smoke discharging screens stop Since my Commander has demanded smoke-producing projectiles task would have to fall own worry General Staff Regal Army that our initiative such half employment can be taken advantage of from adversary toxic means in order to accuse employment to us (...).".

Circa the modalities of attack of the infantry, all the commanders emphasized the disadvantages found:

"(...) and absolutely necessary to remember to all - Geloso to the Commanders of the army corps wrote - than during the preparation the infantries they must lock until at a distance of safety, for being able to reach by rush on the enemy position before that the defender has had way to resume itself and to react with speediness and effectiveness (...).

Whichever pause on the battlefield between lengthening of the shooting and release of the infantry will succeed fatal and will jeopardize on being born every possibility of succeeding (...)" ⁽³⁴⁾

Gen. Mercalli, that it still had in front of the eyes the lacked conquest the Spadarit, confirmed:

"I have seen 9 and 10 current units - sometimes entire battalions - than for hours and hours, sometimes for the entire days, although most violent and continue artillery concentrations and of infantry fire, they have not made that little meters in ahead and then are remained pinned to the land. An infantry battalion has preferred to remain all the day under the deadly fire of the enemy mortars and to endure most serious losses rather than to make that step ahead that, beyond to give the possession of the objective, it would have avoided many painful and useless losses (...)" ⁽³⁵⁾.

All this had a name: training deficiencies of the company junior officer and non-commissioned officers. And such deficiencies it could not be satisfied in rear of, less still, online, being the frightening numerical sparsely of officials in s.p.e. and of non-commissioned officers of career in the regiments.

In order to conclude, some consideration of general character. To criticize a operations plan, especially in the light of results, is too much easy and often it is translate in a simple disquisition of doctrinal nature. But some data of fact are unequivocal. The counter-offensive had to be in fist to the Command of army in order to avoid single efforts and it does not coordinate of the three Corps, but the army could take part

34) DS 11th armed Command f. 025623 date 12.3.1941.

35) DS Commando IV army corps, f. 01/1288 date 14.3.1941

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

in the battle only with the *Siena* - than in practice it was the reserve of the VIII Corps --, two groups of 149/35 mm. and aviation: too much little for the employment of an instrument to whose fundamental pawn, the binary division, had been removed the maneuver possibility intentionally in order to transfer it to the advanced level. The VIII army corps attacked with three divisions in the first formation and one in second: little or null to object if such device had been composed from ternary divisions. That being, insufficient was not the theoretical probability of penetration (admitted that one of breach) given the force ratio of 1.5 to 1 in the comparisons of the defense. Moreover the direction of attack of the *Cagliari* was divergent regarding the center of gravitation of the attack, and that one of the *Pinerolo* did not concur a minimum of "game": it adduced frontally to Chiaf Lusit and it was subject to the Trebeshines, to overhanging it. On the left the IV Corps had a task too much isolated and clearly superior to its forces. Also nothing had in hand, as well as in order not to maneuver, how much at least for being able to correct possible errors of execution timely. As far as the XXV army corps, it too much was distracted, and it could not happen different, from the Greek initiative on Tepeleni. Guilt could not be made to find difficulty at the same time to resist on the arms a defensive battle and a offensive effort.

In the days that followed, Cavallero went to the IV Corps: it wanted to clearly see on the action to develop in that field and dedicated many hours to the above places and personal contacts with the commanders in place. It was not easy to at least find a solution, because, also with the employment of the *Cuneense*, the offensive effort seemed heavy somewhat, in its further developments. It convened to Devoli Geloso, that re-examine all the plan, in the light of the time available and of the review of the alignment, and introduced a new detailed plan, to premised of which all major unit had to be placed in full efficiency with adapted intake of complements.

Obviously, in parallel to this reordering was necessary to resolve also the logistic aspect of the problem, and the requirements were not light, especially in the field of the transports. The calculations carried to a *minimum*, giving for acquired other favorable elements, of 1,200 draft animals and two sections of mountain trucks. Sometimes it has been ironic on the demands for reinforces, than nearly always they have characterized the formulation of the operations of this campaign, but the conditions of have evidently not come from the organic weakness present of the

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

divisions, regularly in difficulty after every combat, and, also are lacked to find like nearly never the Italian infantries have attacked with the classic favorable relationship of 3 to 1 in the comparisons of the defense. And on 16 March the reduction of efficiency of the units employed from the Tomori to Tepeleni was estimated in these terms:

Army corps	Division or unit	Reduction of efficiency
IV Corps	<i>Pusteria</i> Alp. Div. (less 11 th alp) 11 th alpine <i>Cacciatori</i> Inf. Div.	of 20% of 35% of 10%
VIII Corps	<i>Cagliari</i> Inf. Div. <i>Bari</i> Inf. Div. <i>Pinerolo</i> Inf. Div. <i>Siena</i> Inf. Div. cc.nn. BG	of 40% of 30% of 50% (a) of 5% of 30%
XXV Corps	<i>Sforzesca</i> Inf. Div. <i>Julia</i> Alp. Div. <i>Lupi di Toscana</i> Inf. Div. 41 st Infantry " <i>Modena</i> " 2 nd bersaglieres "Pizzi" group "Signorini" group "Galbiati" BG	of 50% of 50-60% - of 50% of 50% of 50-60% of 60-70% of 50%
Army reserve	<i>Puglie</i> Inf. Div.	of 50%
(a) the <i>Pinerolo</i> between the end of the February and the middle of March had lost 213 officers (between which 1 commander of regiment, 9 commanders of battalion and 1 artillery battalion commander of artillery) and 3,750 non-commissioned officers and soldiers.		

Also the moral had its weight. If the divisions for a long time in defensive had a "substantially high tone", deriving always having rejected victoriously attempted large and small of the enemy, that deployment between the Osum and Vojussa they had not still seen success to smile on to their attacks. Gen. Gambarà particularly remained hit from the *Puglie* that withdrew in order to pass into reserve of the Army after the ill-fated action at Bregu Rapi, much to address to those soldiers a letter:

"The day before yesterday, bringing to me for service to Devoli, I have passed you while you were directed to the new encampments. I have observed you, unknown to you, one by one. While I congratulate you for the order in which you marched, not

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

I can say nothing about that a particular one has hit me: your appearances. Strange appearances, as of who it has something to reproach itself (...).

You have been perhaps struck? NOT. The *Puglie* HAS STRUCK, been replaced since was it was logical (...)

It is not resolutions drive the enemy out again? Well, you do not want to say. If it were always possible to the first onslaught drive the enemy out again, all the wars would have had to last little days! (...). You are not of the ones won the pelt made that you are not resolutions move out the enemy from the positions who occupied. You have obtained, with your sacrifices, with your repeated attacks, the already considerable result to produce to the enemy the strongest losses, to have forced it of race to make to flow online destined fresh troops to other sectors (...).

All "the success" was hard. All, and in all the sectors. In war especially. You are proud of how much you have made and stand (...)"⁽³⁶⁾.

Cavallero, therefore, examined and discussed the plan about Geloso. It was not of agreement for the action of force against the Trebeshines. Knowing that on the feature of ridge comprised between the northern slopes and hill 1308 found four Greek battalions, and that more to south there was the bulk of the Greek 5th Inf Div., it thought that the investment total of the Trebeshines, therefore as planned by the 11th Army, would have been translate into a very onerous engagement without feeding possibility. Persuaded or not, Geloso declared that it would have see again his program, withdrawing on the concept to turn the effort of the VIII Corps on the left, in order to facilitate the breach from part of the IV, and on the right, in order to open the passage towards the valley of the Deshnicës, with neutralization and opposing coupling of the defense in action on the northern section of the Trebeshines, regulating in according to time an exploitation of the success in the valley bottom in relation to the progression of the IV Corps. As far as the improvement of the situation to Tepeleni, it would have tried it with a local, tending action to re-establish the balance with the entire dorsal possession of the Shendeli, rather than as a result of the total maneuver.

The morning of the 26th arrived a message of Gen. Guzzoni: very probably: on 1 April would have had them beginning the Marita operation. A main group, - of two armored divisions and a imprecise number of mountain divisions, it would be come down along the valley of the Struma heading, with the mountain troops, at Edessa and Florina in order to take contact with the Italian 9th Army. This changed the situation. Cavallero then established to attack in his turn as 31 March and, calculating that the Germanic invasion would not have been in measure

36) DS Commando VIII army corps, f. 1/2203/op. dated 22.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

to make to feel its effect on the front of the Korçano "before a ten of days to predispose the organization of an offensive towards Korça from the sector of Pogradec, with means and forces removed from the 11th army, soon after or eventually during the action of this. It immediately convened the two commanders of army. First he saw Geloso and he illustrated the new defined elements of principle on the base of the modernized situation. In short, it confirmed that the decisive push came delivered against the Spadarit and on the Mali: even if the VIII Corps had been found in front of the same not super skillful obstacles, the breach of the front in correspondence of the head of the valley the work of the IV Corps already would have been a sufficient affirmation to obligate the Greeks at least a partial folding of their right.

"I have news - then he said to him - that on 1 April the Germans will attack from the valleys of Struma and I have made the account of the stages: 4 days for Salonicco, 3 for Edessa and 3 for Florina. But, the English will be battled (are already arrive) and therefore calculation to you 10-12 days. Therefore for the 12th I must deliver an attack from the field of Pogradec.

Concluding, the topic remains therefore set up: to act the 31st with the 11th Army and to mount an action of the 9th that it can begun before ten of days from the sectors of Pogradec and Skumbi, with objective Bilishti, neglecting Korça.

I have convened at Pirzio Biroli in order today, in order to see which means give for the action. While I would look at to give *Florence* (that it still has need of fifteen or so days in order perhaps putting to place) and also some other thing, because account to save here a division of those available ones, less than forms a large hole and is convene to employ it here. Being necessary, I could give some mountain battalion of the *Cuneense*, even if a little worn out one.

All this in phase of forecasts, than will be come true less or in relation to the events and that but condition our action without however disabling of the efficiency. Moreover it will have give of the artilleries, for whose movement calculation 8 days; therefore these artilleries will have to move to the latest 5. They will participate therefore for 4 days to the action in the sector of the 11th Army and then will be moved (...)"⁽³⁷⁾.

It passed finally to the calculation of the forces. The IV Corps could count on the *Cacciatori delle Alpi*, to which it came given the *Intra* alpine Bn., which diamond tip, the *Cuneense*, the *Pusteria*, and, opportunely, for the feeding of the effort, the *Puglie* (in how much the *Pinerolo*, at first destined to this task, had need at least two weeks in order to be completed). Moreover, *Firenze*, for the moment

37) Cavallero diary, date 26.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

held by the Comando Superiore to own disposition, it would be remained which it upgrades the reserve in case of necessity. The VIII army corps remained with the *Bari*, *Cagliari*, *Siena*, and *Pinerolo*. For how much it concerned the times of the action, it had to attack the 31st towards Monastero and Chiaf Lusit; the IV Corps after one day or two.

With the 9th Army the aspects to define they were various:

"(...) Among the several hypotheses it is from previewing that to a sure moment Germanic troops point on Edessa and Florina - Cavallero explained to Gen. Pirzio Biroli, who arrived at Post 34 with the chief of general staff, Gen. Spicacci, the head of the operations section, Col. Trabucchi, and the Quartermaster, Col. Biglino - we have predisposed a offensive action of beginning next to the center, but in relation to the times on which they are oriented to me, I have need that the 9th Army before the 10th is ready to release (...). day X (end of month) attacks to the center. To the quarter or fifth day creed of being able to free the artilleries, because the infantries will have already advanced. Therefore day 5 it must begin the movement of the artilleries; you arrange means so as to be able to be ready for the 10th. Gen. De Agazio will go to see them and provide to the starter. We will care also the approach of *Firenze*, but it will not be ready that before fifteen days. And but one good division, with good elements (from Tuscany recruitment), well commanded. If I can free a regiment of the *Cuneense*, even if tried I will give you also that one. As medium tanks we are not well, and neither are they arriving because the ready ones go to Libya for the *Ariete* (...). At the opportune moment all to release on director Bilisti, avoiding Korça"⁽³⁸⁾.

Pirzio Biroli already was oriented, is pure for sums heads. During the inspection in the eastern sectors, Mussolini had foreshadowed that probably "in the first decade of April" would have had to operate in order to retake the ridge of Korça. Also considering the deriving conditions of favor the political-military situation and from the coupling of the greater part of the Greek troops for work of the 11th Army, the allocation to the 9th Army was however indispensable to at least one sensitive share with the preventive forces for the same goal, less well in other hypothesis. Cavallero consented: he would have given to the Commander XIV Corps, *Firenze* and the *Messina*. In logistic field (800 means) for the necessities of supply until to Florina were necessary at least two truck battalions. However the complicated issue more was the finding of a advanced base for feeding the offensive beyond border. The Comando Superiore had, already in January, studied this aspect thinking to implant preventively a logistics base

39) Cavallero diary, date 26.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

at Bitolj, in Yugoslavia, connected with railroad of standard gauge with the line Vardar-Belgrade. The base must have one such consistency, 15-20 days, to allow the successive constitution of one railway line Bitolj - Florina. In order to realize this it had been interested the O.K.W., so that the premised on the government of Belgrade, but Mar. Keitel had answered negatively. Now that the situation was changed and the political relationships with the Yugoslavia had assumed a very different aspect, could be tried directly with Belgrade⁽³⁹⁾.

The Cavallero evening telegraphed Mussolini, that, exceeded the disappointment was returned to see all rose and easy, thanks to the Yugoslavian adhesion to the Pact:

"Duce, you allow me thank you with most devout mind for your letter, for relation communicated to me & for your telegram approximately my future tasks stop Your confidence in me of great comfort & incentive at more and more tenaciously to operate stop.

I inform that given fixed for noted action is thirty-one current stop I have not been able to anticipate having to attend indispensable artilleries of imminent arrival for fourth armed corps stop Your just recommendation to make to precede infantries attacking from some element special troops finds reply in the allocation already made of some alpine elements assigned to this end stop I'm brought near divisions Commanders calls to operate in the main field for giving to directives & incentive stop Today conferred also with general Gambara & this evening I will see general Battisti new commander *Cuneense* who must attack Spadarit stop.

The general plan remains what you that is know action on entire front corps eighth & fourth more action than detail on the front Scindeli- Vojussa for giving to breath at Tepeleni stop Main action will before comprise three convergent directions on line Mali stop against Spadarit (*Cuneense*) stop Second against Bregu Gliulei (*Cacciatori*): these two pertaining divisions at fourth army corps stop Third from the front of the Scialesit on back of Ciafa Sofiut: your division will act eighth corps with *Cagliari* division reinforced from other - stop.

On the front of the Tepeleni and in particular in the enemy sectors Vojussa & Dhrino having considerably reinforced its alignment with obvious offensive intention stop in forecast of this I have reinforced Tepeleni front with by now ready division *Casale* for employment stop.

I have received today telegram indicating given to beginning to the German operations & movement previewed towards Florina stop In relation at that I have decided that before day ten April on the left wing of the ninth Army is ready to operate in Bilishti direction in order to go encounter at movement such Germanic troops stop dispositions correspond to a program that Army Headquarter has already recently studied & for which I think to be in a position to supplying all the average demands with some reserves for how much concerns motor vehicles,

39) On 25 March the Yugoslavian government had joined to the Tripartite Pact.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

problem that I examinee but it is necessary stop that reaching to Florina our troops can receive sure supply via Yugoslavia, without of that our advance could not further be fed stop has telephoned on this argument to General Guzzoni, that General Scuero with all concrete elements for has already examined issue & tomorrow will make to find Quartermaster General in Rome for problem solution stop

As far as the date of the tenth by fixed me for preparation in action of the ninth army, given it corresponds at maximum effort for us possible stop Held account necessity that some indispensable artilleries for such action must be removed from the center field them where famous current offensive & from other held side will be begun day thirty-one account of the distance that Germanic mountain troops must cover also not connected with combats, think that given from previewed me our cooperation with the ally stop

As far re-enters in the picture This program above all places us the problem of the motor vehicles and that one of ammunitions stop Also on this according to argument I give assignment at Scuero to confer with War Minister stop I hope that the supposition program meet your approval however I will be pleasing if you will want to introduce me to your observations stop". ⁽⁴⁰⁾

All, therefore, it appeared well started certainly not the day after, 27 March, in the afternoon, Col. Amè, head of the S.I.M. communicated synthetically: "Carried out coup d'état in Yugoslavia. The power has been assumed by King Peter II. New head of the government is General Simovic, already commander of the aeronautics. The Yugoslavian troops to the Macedonian frontier fraternize with those Greeks. The eastern frontiers and Albanian they have been closed. To the border they have been taken emergency measures. Today at 17:00 it has been announced the meeting at Sokol. The ministers signers of the Tripartite Pact have been arrested and Regent has escaped. The Yugoslavian inner situation, for previewed how much but not in this shape, temporary paralyzes the performance of the German operating program ".

4. THE WINTER OPERATIONS IN THE FIELD OF THE 9th ARMY.

When Cavallero assumed the command of the Armed Forces of Albania, Gen. Vercellino thought opportune to emphasize endured just the thought approximately the possibilities of the adversary in the field, taking cue from a communication of the S.I.M. that showed the probability of a Greek offensive on all the front of the 9th Army in order to reach Elbasan. The violence of the combats carried out in

40) Cavallero diary, date 26.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

last days in the zones of Mt. Papatit and Bregu i Math, persisting of the Greek effort in more adverse the climatic conditions, the activity of enemy aviation, continuous the obvious to flow of reinforcements, all clearly gave the feeling of the importance attributed from the Greek Command to the objective of Elbasan. Now, the regression of the front on the Bregu alignment the Math-Lemnusha, eastern slopes of the Tomori, could represent gain of time for the greater logistic difficulties imposed on the enemy, but the certainty not to cut a repeated attack if with the same intensity of those carried out to the half and the end of December. If therefore the information supplied from the S.I.M. had foundation, Vercellino thought the fulfillment of the demands most urgent for reinforces already formulated orally to Gen. Soddu. The analysis of the Greek *possibilities* undoubtedly was corrected, but the *probability* that effectively the enemy attack had feared place therefore like. The Comando Superiore Albania, also recognizing the impending dangers on the alignment of Vercellino - than still he had moreover not resolved the serious problem of the rearrangement of the units - thought the continuation of the Greek offensive in the sector Tepeleni - Deshnicës valley more dangerous and reliable, and had reason. Therefore the first order of Cavallero was to draw the attention of Vercellino

"(...) on the unavoidable necessity that in any hypothesis and general situation or of the army, this holds own right, at whichever cost, securely berthed to the Tamori, since the loss of this support would compromise, perhaps without remedy, the left of the 11th Army.

As far as the eventuality of a Greek offensive against the 9th army, the Comando Superiore limited itself to decide to maintain the contact with the enemy on all the front, from the lake of Ohrida to the Tomori, for make sure timely of its real intentions, and to firmly fix a greater solicitude in the shipment from the rear of tools and materials in order to confer to the strengthening works the necessary development and the consistency. Of other part also the complements were reaching, also with by now sadly notes disappointments:

"I thought that the organic battalions arrived from Italy for the restoration of the *Parma* - Vercellino wrote - were units securely framed, instructed and brought together, so as to be able to constitute at once the new skeleton of a offensive device.

The 50th Bn of the that it is today flowed in zone is, for against, composed of coming from various elements from various centers, not still it brings together to you and instructed. The company commanders are recalled officers, of old age or health

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

unsteady. The commander of the Bn., in A.R.Q., has not never commanded the corresponding unit. The majority of the troop does not know the Breda machine-gun, never have they done the launch of a shell.

Introducing itself to this Command, the commander of the Bn. has declared of ready being, as soldier, to every sacrifice, but that his Bn. Has need of a period of amalgam, harmony, instruction.

As much signaled to you above, Excellency, because your participation obtains from Italy units that are truly ready to the war and units not to instruct"⁽⁴¹⁾.

In the late evening of 2 January a violent fire of artillery of medium and small bore on Mt. Kalaze had made to think next to the beginning of the attack against the III Corps, but after a pair of hours the action had been extinguished in order to resume the successive day to intervals. It was at 10:00 of the 4th that the true preparation against Mt. Kosica had beginning, in the field of the Arezzo. To the term of it the infantries of the Greek 17th Inf. Div. - that had replaced the 13th - attacked decidedly with units camouflaged with coveralls white, succeeding to put foot on the main height the relief after the death of the commander of the company located in the center of the field of decimated the II/84th and resisting to a first a counter assault; then the action was increased to work of unit of the 9th Inf. Div. on the front margin of the plateau with alternate vicissitudes, until the participation of aviation of Tirana obligated to silence the Greek artilleries and mortars, concurring the restoration of the line. Given the situation, Vercellino put to disposition of Gen. Arisio the other two pre-announced battalions of the *Parma*, with the tie to only hold them in reserve for a maneuvered reaction and in case of compromising inflection. This allocation, suggested from the circumstances, once delayed more the beginning of the reordering of the divisions more tried, while it came to lack the constitution a reserve to favor of the XXVI army corps, of front to which they were signals new influx of troops. For two days still the Greek efforts were renewed, but the effective organization of the defense and the immediate constant participation of the III Corps artillery always succeeded in enfeeble the attack and exhausting.

All the main Commands had made treasure of the experiences, reaching more or less the same conclusions. The Greeks did not employ some tactical measure which innovation character could attribute itself: they applied to the common procedures to all the European armies,

41) Cavallero diary, date 26.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

coming near in particular, for how much it had drawn with the organization and the employment of the fire, to the French norm.

After all a methodical action, measured, slow, very rarely on wide forehead. For be opposed to the Greeks the possibility would have been enough to put into effect, with some adaptation, how much sanctioned one from the enforced regulation in matter of defensive: alignment in depth of means of fire and units for the movement reactions; adapted counter-preparations of fire. The alignment in depth of means of fire was feasible in full load only when the defensive attitude came assumed liberations, outside from the pressure of the enemy, and unfortunately very rarely that had happened much. How much then to the staggering in depth of the support, in practical it was always lacked for the deficiency forces. The little consistency of the binary divisions, the insufficient conditions of efficiency of the units, worn away and reduced to the bone, had not concurred up to now that the counter assault, which had given nearly always good results but simply on the local plan. The slowness of the Greek progression and its nearly constant limitation to foreheads many extending did not introduce optimal conditions for the counterattack, however in order to execute it was necessary to have to the hand organic efficient units. Towards the middle of January the III Corps could begin a slow rearrangement (sketch n. 100). The defensive organization improved considerably, in spite of the lack of the effectives and the unsatisfactory conditions in which introduced often the complements too much. In logistics topic the army corps not move very far one from the others. In all it had 11 ambulances, of which 4 assigned to the divisions, but the state of the roads and the difficulties of the repairs made yes that sometimes in all the G.U. worked only *two* ambulances. It was in the second fortnight of January that the situation in fact of transports improved for the arrival of 2 ambulances sections and some regimental cars sections (that they came endured centralized to the C.A.); for converged the rendering of the workshops for the deficiency of replacement parts remained most limited and got worse the street conditions further because of the intensity of the traffic and the paltry maintenance.

Cavallero, while, had circulated directive n. 9, centralized on the participation of the *Lupi di Toscana* to retake the Qarishta and Fratarit, and n. 10, tending to resume the initiative in the fields of Valona and Berat, But existed also the problem of the anchorage at Tomori. Already on 13 January Cavallero and Vercellino they had examined the possibility of an operation in Tomorreces valley to which he had

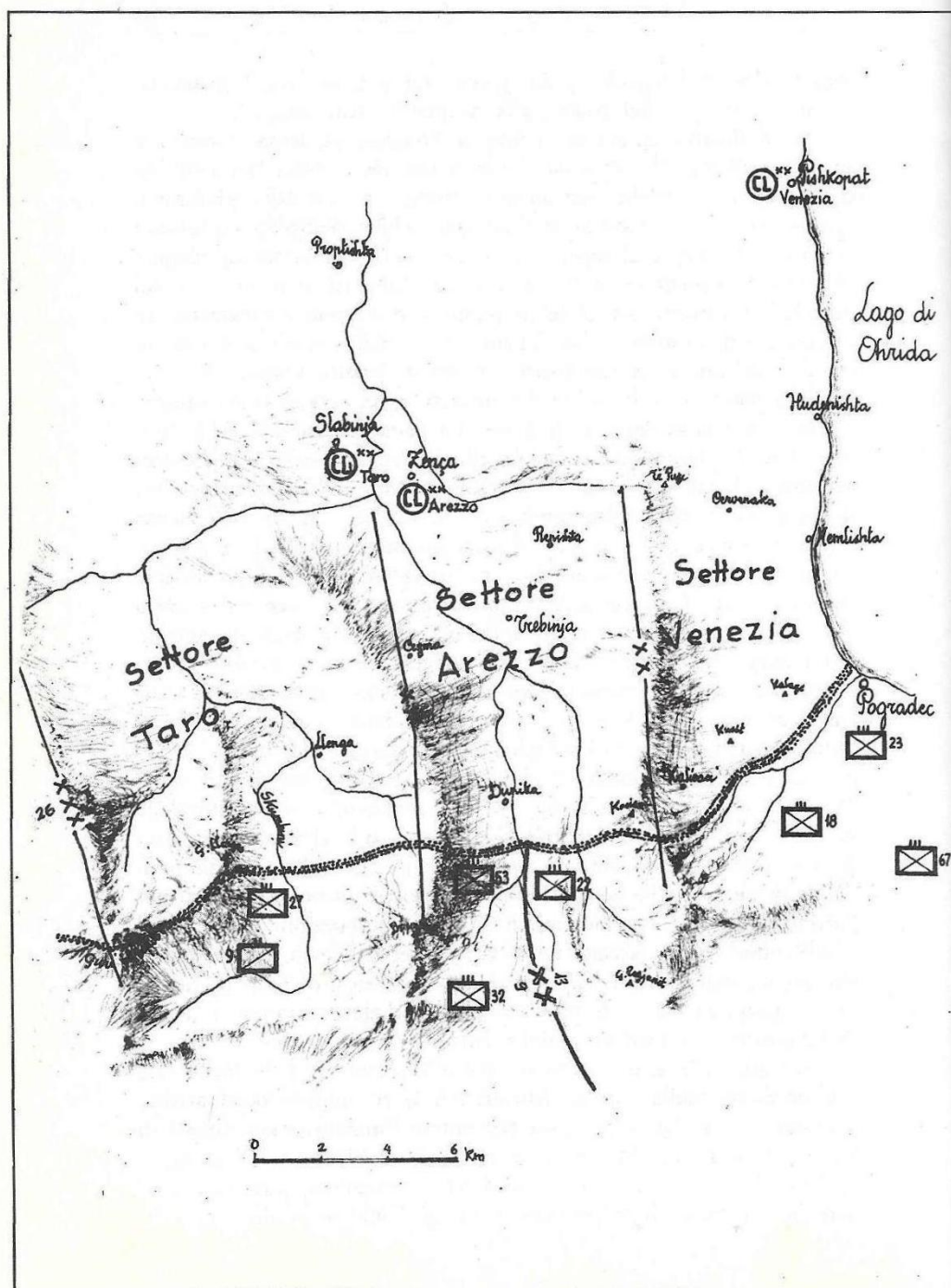
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 650

The situation with the III Army Corps to mid January

Schizzo n. 100

LO SCHIERAMENTO DEL III CORPO A METÀ GENNAIO



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to follow analogous effort in the Osum valley from part of the 11th Army. In the days following, after the talk with Mussolini to Foggia, it was decided the resumption of offensive activity to east of the Tomori to the twofold goal to lighten the Greek pressure against the *Pusteria*, it is recalling forces in Tomorreces valley is preventing the transfer of said unit from the valley to the Osum area, and to create suitable conditions to the operation planned for the end of February on Korça. The directives of Vercellino to Gen. Nasci of all fixed one more emphasized exploratory activity in order to assess the consistency of the Greek device, then the formulation of a offensive understanding to carry in two times the right of the XXVI Corps to Teqesino to cancel the solution of existing continuity between the inner wings of the two Armies.

The beginning date was left the choice of Gen. Nasci, however as soon as possible so as to precede the opposing moved previewed. The XXVI Corps had also a thread like alignment, but with the arrival of the *Susa* and *Intra* Bns. somewhat it had been strengthened in Tomorreces valley.

Moreover remarkable mixture of units continued to subsist⁽⁴²⁾.

After a relationship held 16 to the divisions, Nasci circulated the operations order for the offensive, entrusting some the execution to the divisions *Cuneense* and *Parma* and establishing of the beginning at 08:00 of 20 January. However, in transmitting for information the document to the Commander of army, wrote a personal letter to Vercellino represent that the torrential rain of the previous night and the consequent flood of the water course had removed some footbridges on the Tomorreces and interrupted the bridges on the Devoli in the zone of Han and that therefore became probable that, not improving the meteorological conditions, the start of the operation could endure some delay. Vercellino could not that to take action of the exceptional adversities of the weather and to authorize a given movement, emphasizing but the necessity

42) Its worth the pain, here, of relative recording to the intermingling of the forces. If it appears endured clearly from the single listing of the numerical indicated of the infantry units, less the results much for the alpine regiments, in whose within the characteristic of the regional recruitment constitutes an ulterior tie. Existing tie between permanent the mountain battalions, mounts joins to the strait and valleys, the whose unobservable - obviously under the pressure of the events - added uneasiness to uneasiness, such that Gen. Nasci, that he was also Inspector of the Mountain troops, could not by telephone represent to the Comando Superiore Albania the bad employment of the units in issue when the evening of the 16th. Know that the *Val Cismon*, already destined to the 7th alpine of the *Pusteria*, came diverted to the 9th (*Julia*) and the *Val Chiese* of the 6th (*Tridentina*) came temporary started on the 11^a armed.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to quickly carry the maximum contribution to the 11th Army, that it imposed not - only the welding to Teqe, but also "*the coupling and the destruction of important enemy forces*". On this point Nasci taken position: the bad weather insistent interrupted nearly all the telephone links continually; the muleteer in conditions always gets worse had transformed itself in true mud torrents; the supply rations and ammunitions, reduced to pure the indispensable, was carried out with enormous difficulties to times triples to you regarding the normal; the footbridges offered precarious passage also to the only pedestrians; the cableways, also in uninterrupted activity, could not give an equal contribution to the requirements; the draft animals dragged themselves literally for the exhaustion; the crisis of the supply for the *Cuneense* had become a serious problem to resolve with urgency. Gen. Ferrero wrote in purpose, commander of the division:

"I have yesterday covered the mule track in object along which all must be put into effect indifferently the supplying interesting the units of the field to my orders. The conditions of the road - if therefore it can be still called only indescribable; leading that daily they cover it sinks in some features in the mud end over to the knee; the mules to the end of their hard work are exhausted.

The situation is reached that is to a such point to compromise seriously and to render the supplying dangerously uncertain; I expose to that such Command dangerous state of fact because it is provided.

I will put to the job between the footbridge of Han and Shemerdhej 50 men of cop.r.t. and the 50 men of the stretcher-bearer unit located at Shemerdhej, only staff of which I can decide in how much, as it is famous, cop. the Handicraftsmen of the division is still at Bar. I ask that Commander that is put at once to the work between Shemerdhej and Ermej at least 100 bourgeois laborers (...)"⁽⁴³⁾.

Nasci, therefore, replied that account of the necessity of giving competition became totally to the Geloso Army,

"(...) But the performance of a similar task presupposes a freedom of movement and a possibility of maneuver that today, especially in consequence of the present climatology adversities, me they are absolutely precluded for the reasons that of continuation I reassume here:

a) the passages on the rivers Verces, Devoti and Tomorreces until this moment concur only the found it hard supplying of the indispensable provisions, excluding whichever several supplies of ammunitions and materials;

b) the muleteer a lot has become absolutely impracticable that men and draft animals are forced to ramble for fields, meadow and forests to the search of passages, being employed 12 or 14 hours to make a distance that in normal times is made in 4 hours;

43) DS D. Command Cuneense alp., f. 212/op. dated 19.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

c) the snow amount fallen in these days has caught up a height that varies from a minimum of 20 cm in the lower localities to 1 meter approximately on the Bregu i Math and to a maximum of 2-3 meters on the high slopes of the Tomori.

For giving an idea of the enormous difficulties that the units today online must *only face for living*, I cite the following examples;

- in order to clear a financial policeman hurt in the zone of Lemnusha, the stretchers have employed seven hours to arrive to the section of health of the *Parma* div., implanted near Sotira and others seven hours in order to reach the roadway in Molini zone of hill 208 (where the ambulances can reach only);

- the supplying of provisions, from the nucleus subsistence of the *Parma* div. (situated near H=hill 250 to east of Kushova) to the battalions of first group of the same division, demand from the seven to the eight hours (...).

Premised how much over and held account:

- than in the afternoon today it has resumed to snow in all the sector;
- than the losses for freezing considerably they are increased in these last days;
- than the *Ceva* Bn. it has tried, a month makes, an operation analogous which completely is failed although the climatic conditions were, altogether, better of it puts into effect them, I think right to show Your Excellency the difficulties of immediate actions to wide beam, which would achieve the only result to wear away the troops under my orders without some benefit for the 11th Army (...).

It is reserved to introduce my understandings operated to you hardly the meteorological conditions and climatic they will concur of being able to put into effect immense offensive operations with some probability of success" ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

Except in the afternoon of the 21st, seen an improvement of the time, the Gen. Cavallero sped up the 9th Army to take part in the Tomorreces valley in order to prevent that the Greeks act in forces against the *Pusteria* on the verge of collapse. "*I await a precise answer*" concluded the message. A few later hours an officer of the Command 9th Army it was introduced to Gramshi, to the Command of the XXVI Corps, bearer of a letter with which the Gen. Vercellino insisted in his turn so that they were routes the delayed. Nearly at the same time Gen. Nasci returned, that from the day before personal recognition to the fields of the *Cuneense* and the *Parma* was absent for one. Read the communication, a picture of the situation telephoned to Elbasan making: the state of the practicability although slightly improved he was still horrible; carrion of mules remained swallowed by the mud emerged a little everywhere and the draft animals survivors were to the extreme: "*I leading does not have more human form for the mud that covers them from the feet to the head*"; in the previous days it had been possible to carry out, and with difficulty, the supplying

44) DS Commando XXVI army corps, f. 503/op. dated 19.1.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of the rise provisions, but now it had to supply to the movement in ahead of part of the batteries and ammunitions. It convene therefore to decide at least of a pair of days, in order not to go encounter to a probable failure with negative repercussions on the mind of the soldiers. Of other part, they were as soon as it arrives 700 complements for the 5th alpine and the baggage train of the *Susa* Bn.. After all it proposed the date of the 24th. Gen. Vercellino approved of and in confirming for written the order, he added:

"(...) In case it was judged still inopportune, for serious logistic reasons, the movement ahead of the current front, the action will be able to have the characteristics of the offensive recognition, for which - after achieved the destruction or capture of strong enemy elements - us filler on the line of departure. But, Devesi to always keep in mind that, as soon as possible, the right of the alignment in Tomoreza valley will have to be carried to Teqe as per order of the Comando Superiore"⁽⁴⁵⁾.

But the evening of the 22nd a new meteorological worsening brought back the high seas situation. At 11:00 the 23rd Nasi had to telephone to the Chief of the G.S. of the army that the Devoli and Tomorreces rivers in flood had newly swept up the footbridges; that the continuous and violent rain and the partial dissolution of the snow for the sirocco had still rendered the state of the muleteer prohibitive, rendering very serious the problem of feeding of an offensive; that the division commanders unanimously thought of all the uncertain, for reasons of logistic nature, the performance of the previewed operation; that in any case "*the units are ready, they will do all that is possible, but not intended great things*". For all the afternoon telephone calls from Tirana were intercrossed, Elbasan, Gramshi and from the Commanders of the *Cuneense* and the *Parma*. Closing the issue a telegram of Cavallero to Vercellino:

"Duce wants to give You and to general Nasi expression its full confidence in the yours work in this moment in which our initiative must, wherever can, be imposed at enemy stop Duce wishes that these its words integrally are communicated also to General Nasi"⁽⁴⁶⁾.

Evidently the real capacity of the operation was seen from Mussolini in way absolutely exhausted. The 24th, at 07:30, units left the lines of departure, after to have known that the

45) DS Command 9th Army, f. 934/op. dated 22.1.1941.

46) DSCSFAA, tele 01146/op. dated 22.1.1941, hours 22,30.

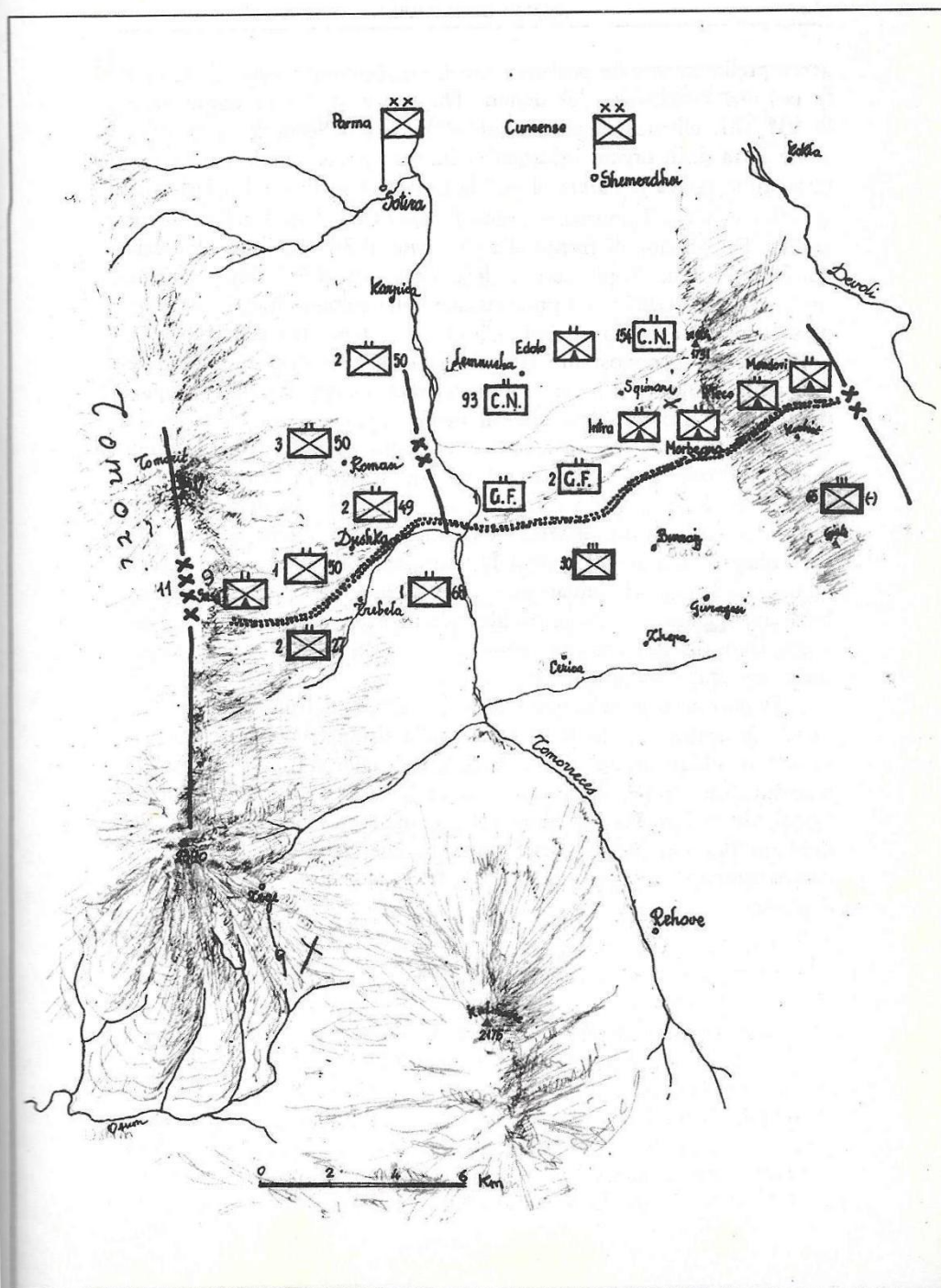
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 655

The sector with Tomorreces valley at the end of January

Schizzo n. 101

IL SETTORE DI VAL TOMORRECÈS A FINE GENNAIO



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

preliminary aerial bombing on the Greek positions would not have had place for the bad conditions of the weather. Of the front to the XXVI Corps was the Greek 10th Inf. Div., pertaining to the V Corps. According to the reconstruction made from the Italian information organs, large way the 68th infantry faced the *Parma*, the 30th the *Cuneense* and the 65th the *Tridentina*.

In effects in Tomorreces valley they were the II/27th and the I/68th; between Tomorreces and Devoli that is in front of the *Cuneense*, the 30th and the 65th infantry; from the Devoli to Guri Topit, field of the *Tridentina*, the 68th infantry (less a Bn.) and the III/65th. The progression of the Italian columns - altogether six battalions acted - was slow but continuous and since the afternoon, in spite of the resistance of the defenders and the inclemency, someone objectives of first phase were reached. The greater difficulties were found to the wings for the sourness of the land, but the 27th the action could be said concluded and the troops began the consolidation (sketch 101). It was be a matter of a jolt in ahead of little kilometers, is true; Çuka and Gjate and Q. Kulmakes were outside capacity but the order of the line was improved, had created possibility of tactical communication with the 11th Army on the crest with the Tomori to the only crossing of muleteer therefor existing, the *Cuneense* appeared well supported to the western ridge of Maja and Korbiet and finally, to judge from the number of the recovered Greek fallen on the place, the adversary had been seriously engaged.

After these events come down the calm on the front of the 9th Army. From both sides it was proceeded to the winter systemizing in order to offer to the soldiers a little shelter, leaving to the combat patrols the execution of recognitions in forces and surprise attacks. The main adversary for both the contenders was the winter. For giving an idea of the wear & wear of the units in that period of absence of combats, the daily losses of the two army corps are brought back:

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Day	Italian XXVI Corps		Greek III Corps	
	died and hurt	illness and freezing	died and hurt	illness and freezing
1 February	4	13	10	20
2»	2	22	17	21
3»	10	16	11	29
4»	8	81	5	18
5»	4	5	1	42
6»	-	37	2	28
7»	1	31	7	31
8»	-	44	3	41
9»	4	31	12	43
10»	1	16	4	42
Total	34	296	72	315

Of course, the issue of a tactical improvement in the Tomorreces valley still was opened, but Naschi, that it constantly held under observation the situation, showed pessimist more rather. No new enterprise of a sure importance appeared possible if before they did not come restores in sure and long-lasting way the bridges on the Devoli and the Tomorreces. Beyond to that, the *Parma* was found in bad condition: for the sourness of the climate and the atmospheric inclemency its units were not in conditions for remaining *in the area* without prejudgment of their combative ability. In the operation carried out from the 24 to 28 January it makes you undoubtedly had brought to light a will, a advanced tenacity and an abnegation to every praise, because they had at act at thousand meters of altitude supplied of common equipment and footwear soaked and corroded from uninterrupted service in the water and the mud, and bivouac for some nights without shelter some. Enough to say that in four days the three battalions employed had 420 cases of freezing. The II/50th, on which the greater burden had fallen back, was not more usable and the other battalions had caught up the breach limit. In exposing all this, gen. Naschi asked for other mountain troops, that, for obvious considerations of organic and moral character, they had to be the 2nd alpine and the Pinerolo group in order to complete the *Cuneense* and the *Val Chisone* BN. in order to complete the 6th alpine. With the allocation at least these units could be thought to grant an adequate period of rest in locality

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

more rear, offering better living conditions, to the *Parma*, indispensable premise for its reordering. For the moment the XXVI Corps had to remain as was, but 10 February arrived in the rears of the Army the *Forlì* Inf. Div., assigned to the III Corps. For Gen. Arisio finally was reached the possibility to replace - not hardly the *Folì* was judged in measure of being transferred online - the *Arezzo* division, progressively, to battalion blocks. Completed the withdrawal of said division, it had to enter into the first lines the *Piemonte*, in substitution of the *Venezia* and the bersaglieres units. The *Taro*, in the meantime, would have recovered the own units. Nearly at the same time the time began to show itself more clement, much to induce the Commander of the 9th Army to try to correct the conditions in which it poured the field of Mt. Kosica, where the units was holding to the land in a altitude subjection (approximately 200 meters of unevenness) and outlet regarding the Greek positions. Since the general course of the P.R. did not concur some regression, became indispensable rectifies towards ahead with retake it of the buttress of the Kosica and to this task the commander of the *Forlì* had to be oriented, Gen. Ruggero. But also the Greeks resumed the activity. While to the east they limited themselves to movements of troops and concentrations of artilleries, they attacked to unexpected the Guri i Topit, the welding point between the two army corps.

Here the extreme right of the *Tridentina*, a detachment of the *Val Leogra* Bn. was found. On 11 February a Greek tactical force to level of battalion moved against Guri i Topit. On the impluse, in spite of the tenacious resistance of a skiers platoon on the south heights, it succeeded to occupy the position, but for how much it was strained with repeated attempts to get hold of the summit did not reach to reach it the attempt nor in the following days. Own offensive was not be a matter of the beginning of one true and, but, as of habit of local points. The greater one of they was delivered the 13 in Tomorreces valley, intending evidently to realize small success, along the buttress between Devoli and Tomorreces and on the high eastern slopes of the Tomori, that allow a new advance towards the north. But the attempt was attended and in spite of the support of aircraft - than, between the other things bombed Elbasan causing important victims and damns the forward reached in front of the position of resistance of the XXVI Corps already worn away from the effective fire of artillery obstruction, so that it came rejected with strong losses. Suspended because of the bad weather, raged with sleet, storms of wind and betting rain, the action

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Greek resumed the 16th against Guri the Topit. The situation was uncertain. The Greeks had organized the operation with the customary methodology. Failed then for the vigilance of the skiers of the *Val Leogra* the surprise attempt, they were passed to the action of force, also nocturnal, based essentially on the superiority of the fire. *"Of against to such conduct - General Pirzio Biroli wrote who on 16 February had replaced Vercellino - that our loss of many officials of the Val Leogra has cost, we are still in the ignorance of the alignment and the enemy decree. The situation will not be changed until when we will not become masters of the hill 2109 of Guri i Topit and of the Fush' e Qerrit"*. The conquest of the two positions initially was entrusted respective to the XXVI Corps and the III Corps, but after a careful examination of the circumstances, and held account of the fact that the state and terrain conformation of the snow did not concur an action rested exclusively on the maneuver and the aggressiveness of the men, and instead demanded a suitable availability of fire to the destruction or at least to the neutralization of the defense prepared the adversary, was decided to delay until 28 February the beginning of the operation.

While it had been obviated to another disadvantage. The joins between major unit were correctly defined with the criterion to avoid zones correspondents to the easiest axis of penetration. That although happened often that the Greeks, found the splice feature, attacked such zone putting in front to the advantage of the direction that one of the intrinsic weakness of the sector joint. Insufficient approvals generic agreements and exchanges of information between the Commands, with the ends in order to adorn the threat, came made resorted to the employment of patrols of artillery connection to exchange, between the divisions and to employ in the fields of the wing with the task to follow the situation rendering any information the Command of belongings, to illustrate the practical possibilities of competition from part of the artilleries of the own division to favor of the welding zone, to recognize objects it to you and, if necessary, to proceed to the observation of the shooting.

The end of February saw cruel atmospheric conditions. On the Guri i Topit torments it had isolated the troops located there and the supplying was tried means of ropes; everywhere the land was of difficult to transverse for the mud and the soaked snow; the water course newly had been engrossed threateningly. In front of this state of things, Gen. Pirzio Biroli, receiving the proposals of Generals Arisio and Reverberi, sent back the operation to the middle of March.

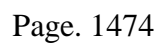
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The feature of the front from Berat to Tepeleni centralized all the attention of the two adversaries. From Tirana the order reached that the *Piemonte* was posted in conditions of ready employment, to disposition of the Comando Superiore of course, to leave from 6 March. To the 9th Army it did not remain that to carry out actions to limited objective, directed to not only engage the enemy in order to prevent the movement of reserves, but also to assure a line of departure that was introduced to facilitate enterprises of greater breath. For how much it had been resigned to yield the *Piemonte*, asked them, as it has been seen, the afternoon of 2 March by Mussolini for the 11th army, given the existing optimism in the comparisons of the imminent counter-offensive in Deshnicës valley, Gen. Pirzio Biroli made to prepare a offensive plan - operations "*Chiesto*" (sketch 102), already set up to the end of February based on the hypothesis of a voluntary Greek regression towards the line of border, sturdy for land conformation and work of fortification. In this case, it was convenient to orient itself to at first exceeding the defense of rearguards on the positions of contact and, subsequently, the delaying resistances to astride of the roadway. The operation comprised also a tending preliminary action to deprive the adversary of the observatories that at the moment allowed the vision of good part of the alignment of the army; to occupy the outlets for the successive phase of breach, and to concur a close alignment of the division artilleries. It had to be put into effect by the *Forlì* four or five days before D day. The III Corps would have been limited, in short, to corrections of the front of limited entity, while the XXVI had to be carried with a leap on the alignment Mt. Çipes - Mt. Mietes - Lenijes acquiring the control of the head of the Tomorreces and the gorges of the Devoli.

The phase of breach, instead, entrusted to the III Corps the task to get hold of ridge of Starova making sure itself the offensive outlet from Q. Pllances towards south-east, previewing the overcoming of the expectable enemy resistance goods a succession of efforts in depth, and to the XXVI Corps the occupation of the eastern relief of the ridge of Korça. The completion of the success would have sanctioned, to north and south of lake Maliq, the caging of the exceeded Greek units. Finally, the exploitation of the success had to lead to the re-occupation of the bar of the Morova, with the supported wings to Mt. Ivanit and Q. Qarrit.

Lasting the bad weather it was necessary to delay also the smaller actions of the Kosica and the Guri i Topit, on which but the situation

DISEGNO DELL'OPERAZIONE «CHIESTO» CON I SUCCESSIVI OBIETTIVI



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

the night on 9 March was improved thanks to an surprise attack executed from units of the *Morbegno* Bn., that it had carried to the elimination of the Greek garrison of the summit. The 16th, the commander of the 9th Army was met at Devoli by Cavallero: the counter-offensive in Deshniçes valley had failed and it dealt itself to resume it with some varying suggested from the experience. The "varying" of greater entity it was the finding of other mountain troops in order to smash in; in other words, the 9th Armed he had yielded the *Tridentina*. Pirzio Biroli at first protested. He had many units in still painful conditions and, known that first of April the Germans they would have given the way to Operation Marita, supported instead the *Marita* operation, for which, beyond counting on the *Piemonte*, it had asked to the *Centauro* and an alpine group. Cavallero explained that Mussolini had by now decided to then concentrate every effort on the direction of Deshniçes valley and Pirzio Biroli resigned to renounce to the *Cuneense*, whose front was less delicate than that holding from the *Tridentina*. Of other part it comprised the requirement:

"Joining Pirzio Biroli in conversation- Cavallero made note of - asserting that noted the good differences that are between *Parma* and *Cuneense* and between *Taro* and *Tridentina*..

Nasci adds that if were not like this the alpine they would not have goal to exist"⁽⁴⁷⁾.

The conclusions of the meeting are known: the 9th Army, whose temporary task continued to being that one of a static defense, came to the *Piemonte*, and in more perhaps another division (the *Cosseria*) and a bersaglieres regiment, against the destined *Cuneense* to the IV Corps. Days 18, 19 and 20 "were taken" from the visit of Mussolini, that a lot was stopped in the fields of the two army corps observing and asking information on the defensive systemizing and the offensive possibilities in near future. With the occasion it pre-announced that the army would have had probably to operate for retake of the ridge of Korça within the first decade of April and promised one new division, the *Messina*. Pirzio Biroli, held account of the forecasts made from the Comando Superiore approximately the affluence of new units from Italy, estimated to decide for the 4 April of the following forces:

XXVI Corps with *Parma*⁽⁴⁸⁾ and *Piemonte* Inf. Div., *Tridentina* Alp. Div. and I and II Bn. of the Financial police;

47) Cavallero diary, date 16.3.1941.

48) Under the date of 10 March Gen. Battisti had left the command of the *Parma* to Gen. Adami and task that one of the *Cuneense*, in its turn left from Gen. Ferrero, that it had assumed the burden with chief of general staff of the Comando Superiore Albania.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

III Corps with the *Venezia*, *Forlì* *Taro* and *Messina* Inf. Div.; reserve of the Army: *Arezzo*⁽⁴⁹⁾ Inf. Div.; a quick group constituted from the lancers of *Milano*, the 4th bersaglieres and tank unit; the forest militia Regt. *Agostini*.

The Greek device had endured some varying. The Commander of the V Corps had been dissolved on 5 March and in given par that one if the 111 Corps practically had been dissolved with the Commander of the sector of the Army of Western Macedonian (SAMO), which it came to having to its direct command five divisions, therefore deployed from the lake of Ohrida to Tomori: 13th 9th, 10th and 16th Inf. Div. In reserve the division of cavalry, composed from one brigade the 1st and 3rd cavalry.

Altogether, the Greeks could oppose 32 battalions, according to the reconstruction made from the S.I.M.. Also not being little, it seemed possible to realize a sufficient local superiority in the breach feature, also because the general situation would have influenced to our favor, therefore Pirzio Biroli was proposed to break through in the field of Pogradec the Greek defensive position in order subsequently to penetrate in depth and to take the adversary in the rear. To such goal (sketch n. 103), at first:

- the XXVI Corps had, making hinge on the Guri I Topit, to carry ahead his right in order to get hold of Q. Kulmakes and to improve the possibilities to move towards the heads of the Devoli and the Tomorreces.

- the III Corps had the task to make to fall the bastion of the Kosica for turning, delivering two violent attacks on Mt. Brumbulinit (*Messina* Inf. Div.) and Guri Regjanit (*Forlì* Inf. Div.).

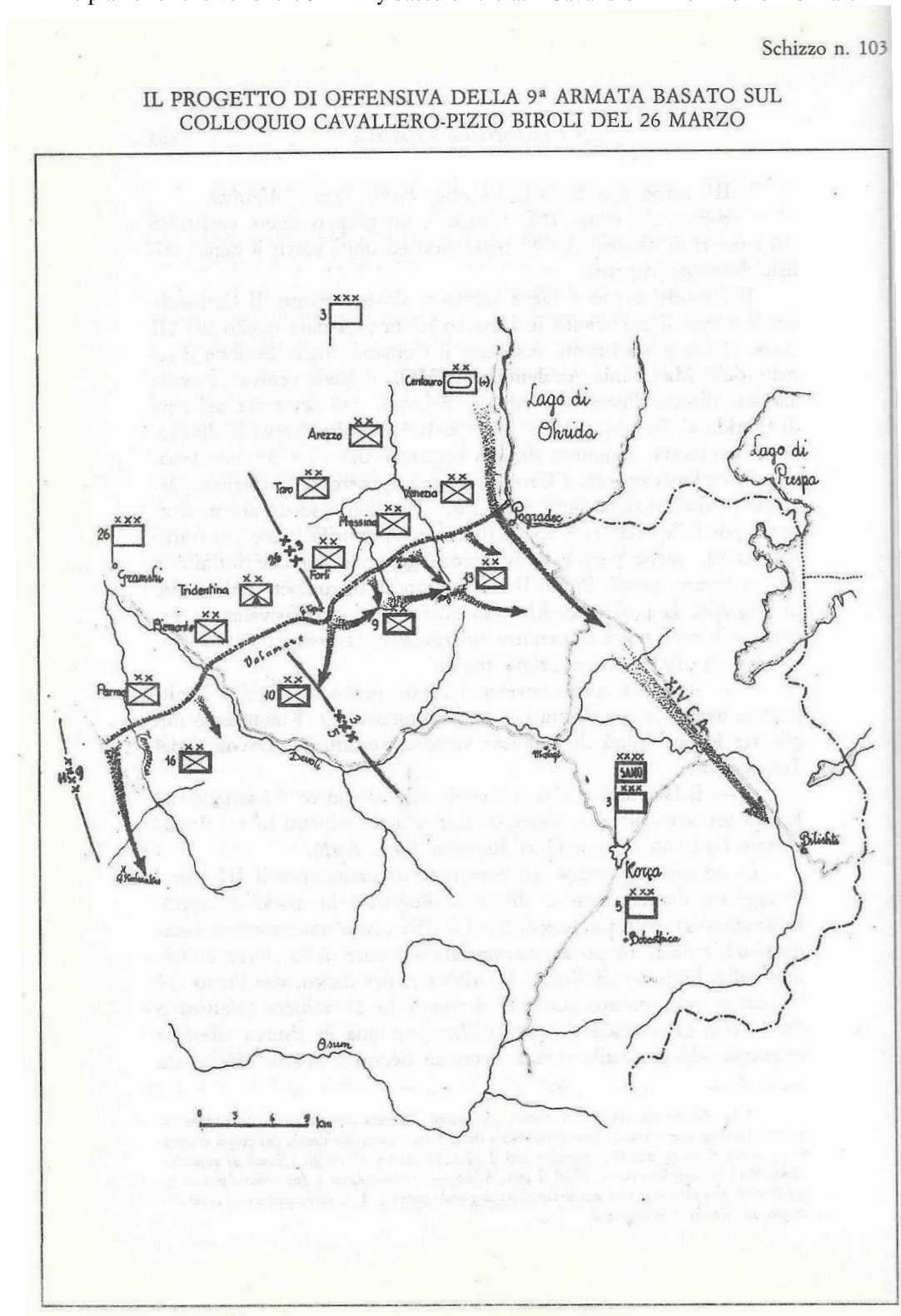
In according to time guidelines they were, for the III Corps to go around from the south-west the defense of Pogradec so as to open the road with the quick group, while the XXVI Corps could be called to send airborne troops to favor of the effort exercised on the director of Korça. To find, for recorded, than the collision of the III Corps was previewed with two divisions in the 1st formation (*Messina* and *Forlì*), two in second (*Venezia* and *Taro*) and one in reserve (*Arezzo*) oriented to act on the left, with a decided offered competition given

49) The *Arezzo* was still in bad conditions. Only withdrawn in part from the line the 225th infantry it still had the responsibility of the extreme right area of the army corps - it had received two Bns. complements on 12 and 13 March. "All the organization officers are of complement - reported Gen. Arisio - the commander and two cop. commanders of the 226th Inf. have never been recalled after the great war (...). the training to the combat of the units are rudimental (...)".

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 664

The plan of offensive for the 9th Army based on the talk Cavallero-Pirzio Biroli of 26 March



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the *Forlì* and *Taro* to favor of the operating forces on the left. An action of breach, therefore, considerably more concentrated and strongly than that putting in action in the field of the *Deshnicës* valley. This operating design, that in bottom was translate in adaptations of the *Chiesto* plan, came being completed until to 26 March, when in a talk at Post 34, the Comandante Superiore promised to the XIV Corps Commander, two divisions (the *Messina* and *Florence*) and, perhaps, a regiment of the *Cuneense*. For the development of according to time on *Bilishti* then it was previewed came employed the new Command of the XIV Corps, than with the quick ones and it leave of the units of the III Corps would have proceeded on the final objective.

The coup d'état of Belgrade modified remarkably this program, both for the removal of forces deriving from the necessity to watch the Yugoslavian frontier, and for the times: first of Yugoslavia then Greece.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Chapter XII

OPERATIONS ON THE ALBANIAN-YUGOSLAVIAN FRONT

1. THE REVIEW OF THE PLANS.

On 22 January of 1930 Gen. Bonzani, chief of general staff of the Army, wrote a few lines with pencil on a folder:

"Once feasible, to make to study a plan of offensive operation from Albania against the Yugoslavia - highly summarized, approximate but likely - for reasons to say orally".

It existed a plan, called 5 E, that it contemplated the shipment of a Expeditionary Corps composed from a Commander of army corps, two divisions, troops and services of C A. It was dealt to develop it. In the September Col. Tellera, head of the operations section, introduced - the plan. For the conditions of potentiality of the ports and development of the Albanian street net of the time it was from excluding, naturally, every possibility of disembarkation and employment of huge Italian forces in those theaters. Therefore any operating design, beyond being based on the hypothesis that the political-military situation concurred the availability of the units being necessary, had also to be founded on the presupposing of an improvement of the Albanian communications, let alone on the existence of sufficient a defensive organization to guarantee the indispensable conditions of security in the comparisons of tried opposing actions since from the outbreak of hostilities. These conditions, according to the opinion of the Gen. Pariani, then head of the Italian military mission, would not have taken place itself before 1934. In that year, in particular, the defensive measures would have comprised (sketch 104) a advanced systemizing, near the border, supported by the *Bojana* Inf., and one of supported more rear arrest to the *Mati* Inf., to obstruction of the director Podgorica - Scutari - Durazzo; let alone an equal complex of support predispositions

The Greek Campaign

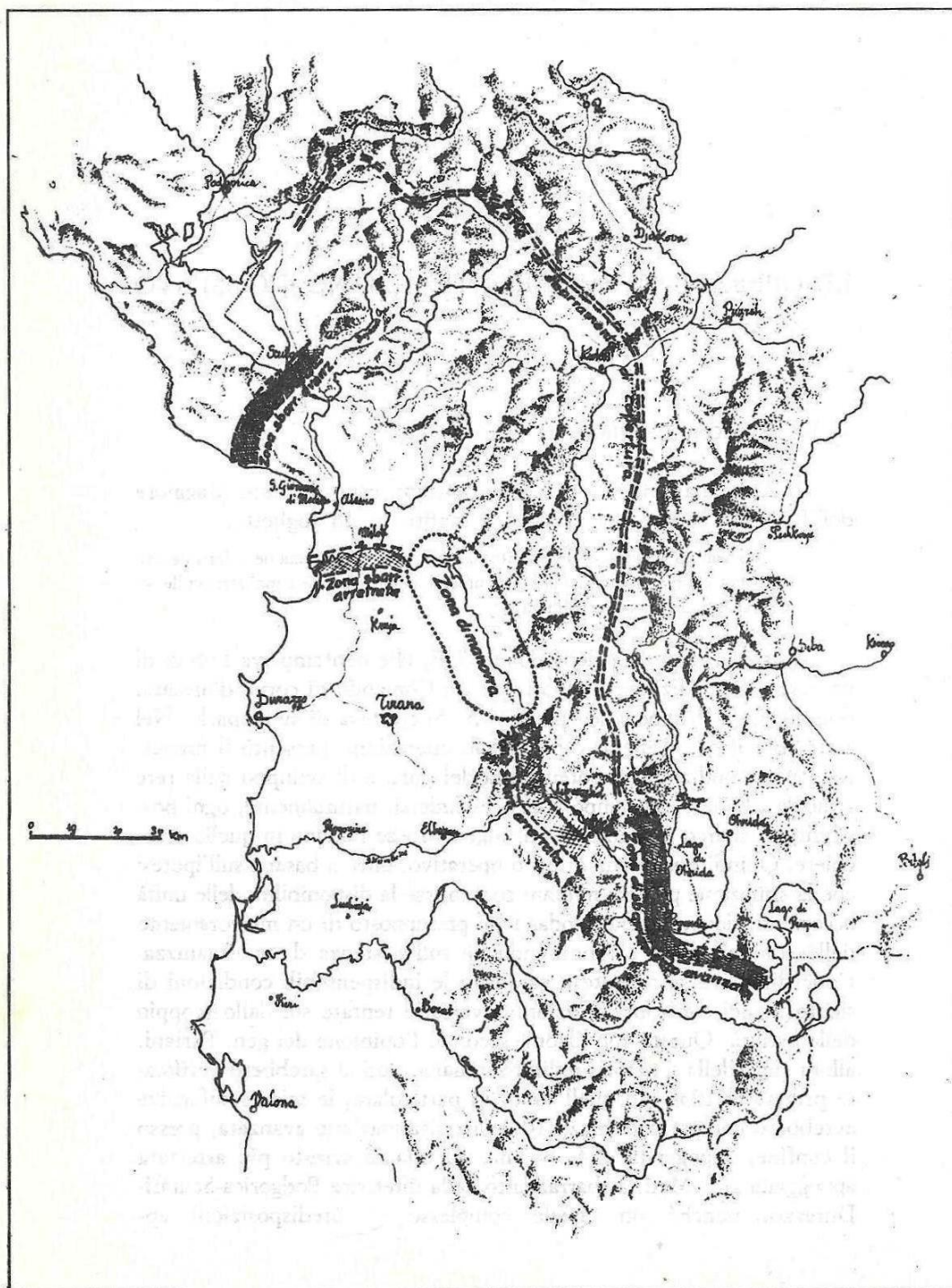
Chapter 14

Page 668

Albanian Defensive Organization previewed for 1934

Schizzo n. 104

L'ORGANIZZAZIONE DIFENSIVA ALBANESE PREVISTA PER IL 1934



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to lakes of Ohrida and Prespa and, more to the rear, the water course Raponi - Skumbini, to obstruction of the Bitolj-Durazzo director.

Between the two organizations an intermediate zone for the cover of one was previewed a strip along the frontier from the lake of Scutari to that one of Ohrida. Finally, the connection between the obstruction of the low Mati to that Raponi-Skumbini was concurred from one maneuver zone. The job hypothesis considered the Italy and Albania engaged in conflict against France and Yugoslavia. In such circumstances 5 Italian divisions were calculated available for operations in Albania, and possibly one quick brigade in formation, and 3 Albanians, facing, initially, to 3 Yugoslavian divisions.

As far as the goals to reach, they could be characterized in following: to provoke the participation in war of other Balkan states, obviously to our side; to provoke uprisings in Montenegro, the Kossovo and Macedonian; to withhold and to attract towards the Albanian theater Yugoslav forces to distract from the Giulion front. The attainment of these goals was thought possible mainly conquering the ridge of Skoplje, that it would have isolated the Yugoslavia from Salonicco, nearly sure raised the Macedonian irredentism and approached the Italian forces the borders of Bulgaria, determining the very probably immediate anti Yugoslav repercussions from Bulgarian side and perhaps also from Greek part.

The highly summarized plan, after all, had chosen one offensive solution for the performance of a defensive task. Gen. Bonzani read the study, that he concluded indicating some measures that they could be assumed since from the time of peace in order to facilitate the putting in action of the logistic apparatus in Albania, of it he approved of the fundamental lines and it decided to hold it to the actions for the moment.

As this plan has seen previously⁽¹⁾ endured modifications in the time and like in 1939 Gen. Pariani, in quality of chief of general staff, asserted in the *Plan for the E.f. requirement*:

"(...) In the hypothesis, for against, than the general situation it imposed of having to deliver true and own offensive in depth against the Yugoslavia, is from excluding that such operations can be from we carried out without a consistent competition from German part (6 divisions) and from Hungarian part (3 divisions), or at least of the divisions that would have to be used for the offensive in Greece, renounce to this".

1) Cfr. CAP. IV.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

In such eventuality, Albania was considered the theater in which the operations must have clearly defensive character in order to demolish eventual direct opposing initiatives against Scutari, Kukes, high valleys of Drin and Korça by means of maneuver nuclei. In any case the defense to the end was prevailed on the line of the reduced one centers them Miloti - Librazhd, extending it towards south-east until covering the ridge of Korça. The program of the work, decided in March 1939, comprised the construction or the strengthening of the obstructions of Miloti, Librazhd, Kruja, Tepeleni-Klisura and Passo Logora, and is the case to observe that, if it had been put into effect, many worries - and much blood - would have been saved and the 11th Army would have faced the defensive battle from the sea to Klisura in very diverse conditions.

Progressing of the war against Greece and the imminence of the counter-offensive in Deshnicës valley they had not made to lose sight to the Comando Superiore the Yugoslavian danger on 8 March, in fact, the resumed operations section the issue, to do again itself to the P. R. 12 of the previous year. In the case in which the Yugoslavia it had been attacked at the same time from Italy, Julia frontier, and from Germany, Austrian frontier, presumable counter movements the enemy in the Albanian theater were translate in an attack in depth from the Dibrano with Tirana-Durazzo objective, subsidized from secondary actions towards Scutari and the Kossovo. Yugoslavia, after all, could operate with 2-3 divisions from the Dibrano, 2 from Macedonian lakes, 2-3 from reinforced Montenegro and 1 from Kossovo. A defensive conception based on the action of wearing down and delay carried out from cover elements derived some, in order to conserve more to along possible part of the Scutarino and Kossovo, and on the defense to the end carried out on the reduced centers.

In total, at least two divisions of infantry were necessary and alpine for the static defense and quick a armored division or which reserve, beyond of course to the vigilance and first resistance carried out in the strip of the border from the units of the Guard to the Frontier, Police officers and Financial police (sketch n. 105). These calculations, naturally, had been controlled to pure claim it of modernization of the plan, without giving much reliability to the hypothesis of a Yugoslavian danger, knowing as Berlin very did not leave space for initiatives against the Axis.

Who, instead, had always hoped has seen itself - it was Great Britain, than in any case it had been striven in order to carry the government of Belgrade in the ally field and she had followed some, the hesitations with hope and apprehension. When Cvetkovic, Yugoslavian Prime Minister,

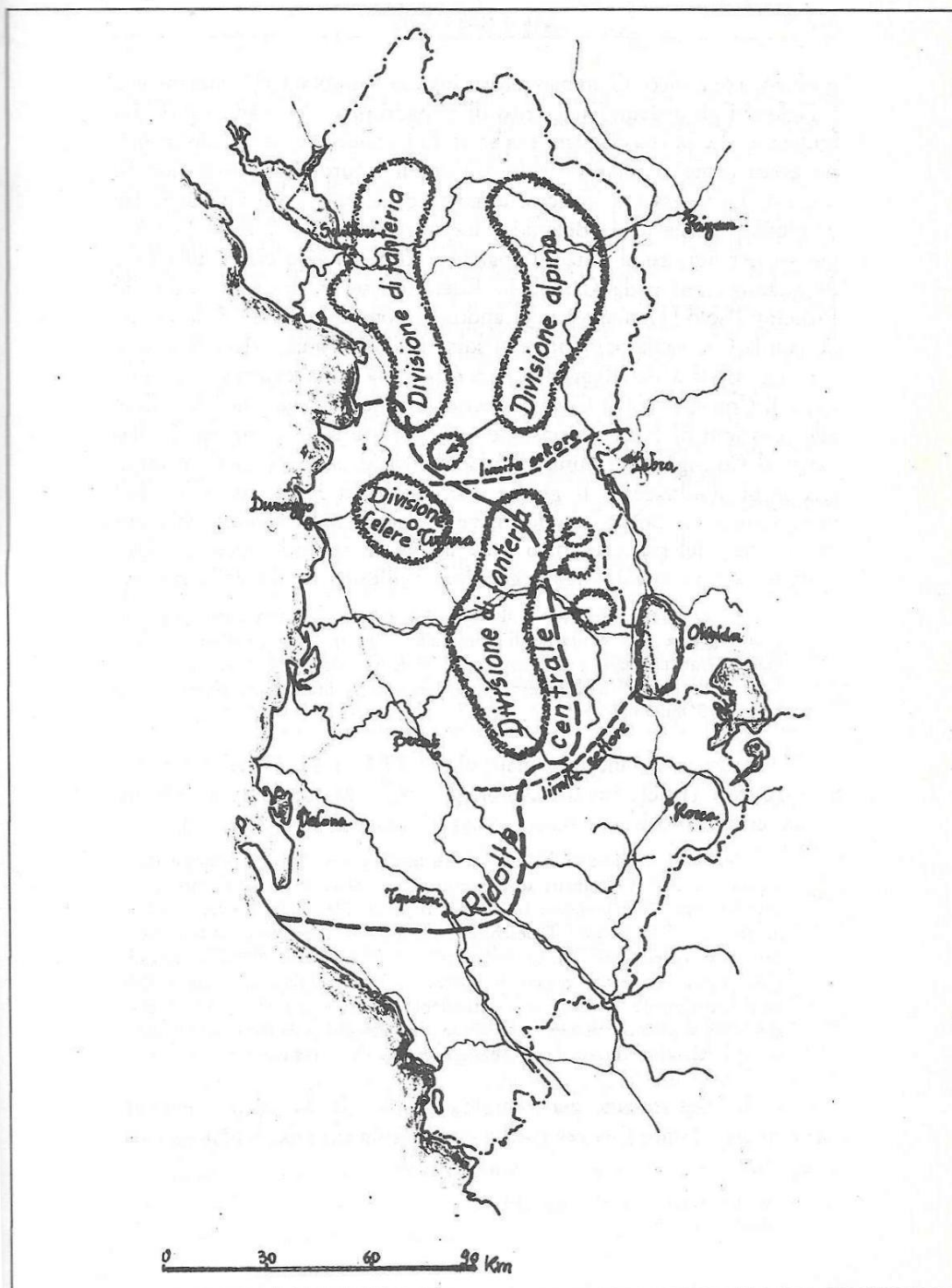
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 671

Alignment previewed from the P.R. (12 May 1941)

Schizzo n. 105

LO SCHIERAMENTO PREVISTO DEL P.R. 12 (MAGGIO 1941)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

he communicated to English ambassador Campbell (15 March) that the Germans had suggested to it to get hold directly of Salonico and that its answer had been to consider Salonico in Greek hand like the best guarantee for the future of the city, was not precise. The truth was instead that just Salonico was one of the three conditions demanded from 12 Belgrade repeatedly - on 7 and May - in order to join to the Tripartite Pact. Not knowing that and on the basis of what reported by Campbell, Eden still wrote a letter to Prince Paul (17 March), urging him not to reach to an agreement with the Germany in order to avoid the fate of Rumania and Bulgaria:

The answer of the Regent was once again evasive, but soon after the Council of the Crown decided, on the whole, to yield to the pressures of Hitler; decision that, capacity in the night on the 21 in front of the Council of Ministers. provoked such discord that three Serbian ministers quit. The successive day is Hitler is Churchill took part. The first one sent true and own *ultimatum*, asking the company for the treaty before 25 March. The second sent a telegram to Cvetkovic, encouraging him on the final outcome of the war:

"The defeat of Hitler and Mussolini is sure. No prudent and cautious man can doubt some headway to the decisions agrees of the democracies of Great Britain and America. There are the only 65 million evil Huns (...). The people of the British Empire and of the United States they add nearly 200 million (...)"⁽²⁾

When then he was informed that on the 25th Cvetkovic had signed the pact with Hitler, he urged Campbell not to neglect the possibility to make to change idea to resisting and to the government:

"Do not allow the creation of a barrier between you and Prince Paul or his ministers. Continue to import, tormenting, to protest. Ask Your audiences. Not to take *not* for answer. To put yourselves to their ribs, insisting on the fact that the Germans consider already acquired the submission of the country. This is not the moment for reproach and for dignified dismissals.

At the same time whichever other possibility to which neglected it must eventually be resorted if we will state that we cannot more make assignment on does not put into effect their government. I appreciate great all that that you have made since then. Continued with every means at your disposition"⁽³⁾.

But the things were already walking alone. For around some months Gen. Simovic had created a small circle of Serbian officials

2) W. CHURCHILL, op. cit., page. 189.

3) Ibid, page. 190.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

with Gen. Bora Mirkovic at the head, vice commander of the aviation, connected to the Serbian democratic party and intending to pull down the government of Cvetkovic. The 26th, when scattered the news of the return from Vienna of the two delegates, the conspirators decided to pass to the action immediately, before dawn of the 27th. There was no resistance and the popular enthusiasm consecrated the military coup d'état. And difficult to give an exact feeling of the disturbing anger that Hitler attacked, even if, all adding, could think fortunate that the political upheaval had taken place before the beginning of Operation Barbarossa. Meeting Goering, Keitel, Jodl and Ribbentrop, decided "*to destroy both the army and the national unit of the state Yugoslavia*"; without to ask diplomatic explanations or to introduce *ultimatum*, just the preparations there were to point had to be delivered a campaign-lightning "*with pitiless hardness*", asking concrete material aid from Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria, than, all, would have had to earn: the Adriatic coast to Italy, the Banato to Hungary and the Macedonian to Bulgaria. Rumania, instead, would have limited itself to watch the frontier with the Soviet Union. Consequence of this report was the "Sheet of instructions n. 25" circulated that same 27 March:

"It is my intention to invade the Yugoslavia with powerful forces from the zones of Fiume and of Sofia with director general's office Belgrade and the territory more to south, to the scope is to inflict to the Yugoslavian army decisive defeat, it is to separate the southern part of the Yugoslavia from the rest of the country, and in order to transform it into a base for ulterior operations of the German and Italian forces against Greece. In particular, I order the following:

a) Not as soon as the concentration of sufficient forces is completed and the meteorological conditions allow it, all the systems on land and the city of Belgrade must be destroyed with continuous aerial attacks, by day and night.

b) If possible simultaneously, but in any case not before, Operation Marita must have beginning, whose first limited objective it will be that one to get hold of the port of Salonicco and Mount Dios" ⁽⁴⁾.

The decision to invade Yugoslavia meant the deep modification of Operation Marita - let alone the delay of Barbarossa - and an unexpected engagement for the government of Budapest, since is true that the main effort in order to destroy Yugoslavia would have departed from Rumania, but the military transports had to cross Hungarian territory. Therefore, while to the Magyar army is offered the possibility to participate to the invasion, earning therefore the title for the

4) W. CHURCHILL, op. cit., page. 193.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

re-occupation of the regions yielded to the Yugoslavia after the first world war, for the transit the authorization was asked in quite brutal terms: "*the problem is urgent. One is asked immediate and affirmative answer*".⁽⁵⁾ If the Regent Horthy and good part of governing atmospheres received the occasion, if not the form, to recover old territories with determined favor, the Prime Minister, Conte Teleki, were opposed fiercely to hardly break a treaty of friendship with Belgrade stipulated four months before, but obviously for how much made could not oppose the German demand.⁽⁶⁾

In the meantime Hitler had sent a message to Mussolini in order to put him to the current of the nature of the provisions taken and being pre-announced the visit of Gen. von Rintelen for the military agreements:

"Duce, the events obligate to me to communicate to you in this fastest way, my opinion on the situation and the decisions that achieve.

1) Since from the beginning I have considered Yugoslavia as the most dangerous factor in the conflict with Greece. The success of the German attack against Thrace could not in fact be guaranteed, from the pure military point of view, such that the behavior of the Yugoslavia remained doubt and with that it could threaten on our enormous front on the left flank of the advancing columns.

2) Therefore I have made all the possible and truly they are strained in order to make me to enter the Yugoslavia in our common interests. Unfortunately these efforts are remained vain, also because they are beginning late for being able too much to obtain to time sure success. The news today does not leave more some doubt on the imminent change of Yugoslavian foreign politics.

3) Now I consider this situation not as catastrophic, but however as therefore serious that gives part ours every error will have to be avoided if we do not want to be found after all to see put in danger our general position.

4) Therefore I have already taken to all the dispositions for being able to go encounter to one development of the crisis with necessary military means. The change of our dispositions of March also in Bulgaria already is ordered.

I ask you now, Duce warmly, not to want to begin ulterior operations in Albania in the next few days. I think necessary that with all the forces that are however available try to guarantee and protect the more important passes from the Yugoslavia to Albania. Not draft of measures that must serve in order much time, but of refolds that the fifteen days at least or three weeks must put forward for next, to the developments of a crisis.

I think necessary moreover. Duce, that you reinforce your forces to the Italian-Yugoslavian front with all means and the maximum rapidity.

5) ULLEIN REVIEZY, *Guerre allemande, Paix russe*, page 89.

6) On 3 April Conte Teleki was killed with a gun shot rather than to collaborate with the Nazi Germany. In his last message to Adm. Horthy wrote: "*to begin from cowardliness, ourselves are allies with a band rouges*".

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

5) Believe still above all necessary, Duce, that on any thing we make or predispose we are observed an absolute silence and that they come to acquaintance of indispensable the only those personalities that absolutely must some know something. Whichever spread of the acquaintance of our preventive measures would lead to their complete de-utilization.

6) I have called today near me the ministers Bulgarian and Hungarian and have confided to them my general lines of thought on the situation and tried to arouse their interest for the case of military developments, with an exposure of the negative and positive consequences that would be created also for them. Since, Duce, without the cooperation of Hungary and Bulgaria cannot sure be operated with that speed that eventually could be necessary because of the events. I will inform to you. Duce, if possible, still in the course of the day tomorrow on what will happen.

7) General von Rintelen will tomorrow announce, Duce, if it will be possible to fly, and the next military measures will communicate you that will come taken from our part this night for the preparation.

If on these measures, Duce, for the case that we had to act, will come maintained silence, does not doubt that both of us will be able to see succeeding that it will not be smaller than Norwegian. This is my granite persuasion"⁽⁷⁾.

Mussolini received the letter of Hitler through ambassador von Mackensen. He had already had a telephone call from Cavallero, than informed him to have taken at once some provisions of precautionary character, but of being oriented towards other more consisting if also it had been of agreement. Mussolini answered affirmatively, adding to suspend "*the other matter*" on the front of Berat, in attended of a political clarification. Then he prepared the answer for the Fuehrer:

"Ambassador von Mackensen communicates to me your letter concerning the situation in Yugoslavia determined after the coup d'état. I wish to say that I have received with calm what happened since I was not minimally surprised⁽⁸⁾, above all from when I saw that to the eve of the signing of Vienna when delivered Stojadinovic to England. And my conviction that the coup d'état already was decided in full agreement with the Regent before the signing. As far as the measures demanded from the situation I communicate to You:

1) It is already has been given to me personally by General Cavallero the order to suspend the offensive, whose beginning was imminent.

7) HITLER and MUSSOLINI op. cit., page. 95.

8) The affirmation denoted one remarkable impertinence. Hitler instead admitted openly of to have been taken by surprise. A month after said to von Schulenburg: "*the coup d'état Yugoslavia arrived like lightning unexpected in clear skies. When the news in the morning of 27 March was brought me, I thought that joke was be a matter of one*".

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

2) Units of infantry are flowing towards the frontier north of Albania and take position on the three guidelines of an eventual attack on Yugoslavia.

3) Orders already are given in order to make to flow towards our alpine frontier orient them seven divisions that unite to the others six existing, more fifteen thousand men than Guard to the frontier already in alarm.

4) All these preparations will be completed more quickly possible and will be encircled from the most absolute secret.

5) In the same zone it is ready to operate the 2nd air squadron.

6) Beside the Bulgarian cooperation and above all Hungarian must hold account also of the Croatian separatist tendencies represented by Dr. Pavelic, who finds himself to short distance from Rome. I wish to assure you, Fuehrer, than if the war became unavoidable it he will be in Italy a very popular one. Also for this reason I totally share your conviction that puts into effect it them crisis will lead to a succeeded decisive full load of Axis ^{"(9)}.

At Tirana, Cavallero had resumed to the hand the plan for the eventuality Yugoslavia. To continuation of the telephone call, he sent to Rome a confirmation telegram, specifying that for the offensive it would have left the date of beginning without but interrupting of the all preparations indefinite and without to diminish the vigilance in the field of Tepeleni. Therefore he circulated the orders to the Commands of armed and the Guard to the frontier: in the first place it was necessary to restore or to complete of urgency the armament and the garrison of the strong points of Librazhd, Zgozhde and Strebilova and to reinforce the safety measures on all the frontier; in the second place the Commander of the XIV constituted witness, army corps, had to move itself to Tirana and to anti assume the responsibility of the Yugoslavia defense from the sea to the line of the cited strong points, taking to the own dependencies, for the moment, the *Centauro* that would be moved very soon between Durazzo and Tirana, Florence that they give the zone of Rrogozhine had to go to Librazhd, the *Milano* Rgt. of cavalry and the "Agostini" forest guards grouping who had also to move themselves to north of Librazhd. Moreover the 11th Army had to predispose the road haulage of the *Puglie*, to carry out on advanced order. To the 9th Army for the moment the control of all the feature of frontier in correspondence of the lake of Ohrida was entrusted.

The morning after, 28 March, reached other news from Rome. First a dispatch of Guzzoni, with which Mussolini was reiterating the directives already given via brief, but placed the strongest tie asked from Hitler to postpone to any offensive.

9) HITLER and MUSSOLINI, op. cit., page. 95-96.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

The second communication was of Gen. Magli, assigned the Comando Supremo, which he perceived that they had been given executive orders for the assumption of the alignment of safety to the Julia frontier and predisposed the performance of the defensive alignment with the movement of six divisions: four from the French frontier, from the Tuscany and from the Lazio. All the day of the 28th was from last Cavallero in talks with the main commanders. The subject of greater relief dealt with Gen. Geloso was Tepeleni. Cavallero was taken care, badly supported, than the depth of the line it turned out reduced to only eight km "*easy to being squandered*" and being convinced that the Greeks would have still exercised a hopeless effort in that field, if other in order not to influence the Yugoslavia. For more the *Julia*, than the 18th and then the 24th had been engaged in an bloody attempt in order to retake hill 1143 on the north ridge of the Golico, had endured an ulterior wearing down, much to render urgent and necessary the reinforcement of 4,000 complements; the *Bari* had the battalions reduced to 300 combatants. And then it was necessary to reorder the artilleries. In order to use the *Puglie*, that it had its artilleries already deployed, it had to give them the 21st motorized artillery of the *Trieste*, but while the IV Corps had the artilleries of the *Lupi*, the *Lupi* had the groups of the *Legnano* and the *Legnano* alpine was receiving the *Po* group. "*We are making salad*" commented Cavallero. Moreover, the Guard to the frontier had been literally undressed and now was indispensable to give back them something if not all. With respect to the offensive actions, that one of the 9th Army remained evidently in feet, because if the Germans had decided to move in a favorable direction in reflection of the 9th it convene to leave from the field of Pogradec. The action of the 11th Army instead in was suspended and depended on the Greeks, or better on Tepeleni who by now had become the banner of the contest.

"You do not have more forces in order to smash in - concluded Cavallero in his conversation with Geloso - and we do not have to wear away all if the problem of the Yugoslavia is not resolved. If all it is worn out that I make? They are also of your opinion that the attack is made in depth or nothing. But you tasks only to your army, while I task also to the threat Yugoslavia. Cleared this concept, to keep itself in a position to attacking [in the field of] Berat and defense of Tepeleni. The criterion to attack in depth or nothing, as you say, here is not worth. I say "*to keep myself in measure to attack with that we have. Particular to define*". To keep in mind that the departure of the *Marche* is suspended"⁽¹⁰⁾.

10) Cavallero diary, date 28.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

It is this a point of view that seems debatable. And true that gives interrogating of prisoners and the deserters the fact was emerged clear who many times the Italian attack had been on the point to succeed, so much that the defenders by now doubted of being able to still resist for long or quite they had begun the retreat, when strange hesitations or insufficient resistance to limits the counterattack the Greek have provoked an unexpected reflux of our battalions in first group. This but very does not justify an attack "*with what we have*", knowing not to have force "*in order to smash in*" and not wanting "*to wear away all*". Moreover from part of the same sources the admission had been unanimous that the moral of the Greek troops was low in consequence of the length of the war, of the lack of the supplies, the unfavorability of reserves, the conviction that the entrance in field of the German forces would have been the finishing blow, that induce to consider excessive the worries for Tepeleni. However, be a matter itself of contiguous fields it is difficult to share the appraisal that in one of own defense it was uncertain and in the other could be attacked, for arrived with inadequate forces. It appears certain, in conclusion, than a serious Greek offensive had closely to be coordinated with an analogous movement Yugoslavia suffering the sure failure. One was, also, known that the British Gen. West, formally air attaché in Rome and currently at Bern, had commented that "*as far as the Italian-Greek campaign, in England today has been convinced that between twenty days Greece will be destroyed*".

The wait of a new Greek action was rooted in Mussolini as in Cavallero; this last one, in fact, the 29th returned on the subject with Gen. Ranza in explicit terms:

"We have a general problem and one particular:

a) general: situation. The Germans will act sure (presumes), but we while take precautions in the fields of Dibrano, Kossovo and Scutari. It must preview that during the events the Greek offensive is intensified and happens also an Yugoslavian offensive;

b) particular. I waited for me an offensive in style on Tepeleni. It seems, according to the letter of Geloso, than there will be bombing of English aircraft in mass (...)"⁽¹¹⁾

Gen. Ranza represented to have lost 60 fighter pilots of 130 and that a good five groups were reduced to the minimums because the staff did not stand more in feet. He communicated moreover that just

11) Cavallero Diary, date 29.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

that day "picchiatelli" they would have bombed by initiative a Greek 152 mm. battery in Deshnices valley, news to which Cavallero express formal disapproval, not being able itself to accept an action in the field of an army without the knowledge of the commander of this, which instead they could interest others objectives. In any case one addressed to Gen. Pricolo, and for information to Mussolini, exposing the difficulties to which would have gone encounter:

"to follow from new created situation for Yugoslavian attitude, it is expectable, very close, probably perhaps imminent, attack on Tepeleni in which I think adversary it will concentrate all the forces and means who can re-unite stop According to news arriving here offensive would be preceded by aerial bombing in great style stop speak about a mass of three hundred English aircraft stop (...)"

Pricolo answered laconically "*does not say*" not to think probable the employment of 300 English aircraft and emphasized that the availabilities of Italian aviation of Albania and the 4th air squadron were numerically advanced. To that Cavallerò, resentful, replied to recover to his judgment approximately the aerial contingent that could be directed against the field of Tepeleni and to only ask that at the moment of the attack the XXV Corps received the *necessary attendance, in the time and the space necessary*.

While von Rintelen had introduced to Guzzoni (28 March) in order to communicate the operational understandings to Germany: Hitler had decided to eliminate Yugoslavia at first, so as to obtain the indispensable safety to the flank before operating against Greece. The action in the Balkans were seen in three phases: occupation of Salonicco and elimination of every land contact between Yugoslavia and Greece; concentric offensive action on Belgrade in order to destroy the Yugoslavia; offensive, finally, in Greece until the Peloponnese. Consequently, 2 or 3 April the German XVIII Army Corps, constituted of three divisions from mountain and motorizing, would be penetrated in territory Yugoslavian in order to go around the defense of the Greek fortified line Rupel-Struma and to advance on Salonicco and, with one column, on Edessa; 3 or 4 April, other forces would have headed at Skoplje so as to eliminate whichever possibility of contact between Yugoslavia and Greece. The 12th Army of Graz would have moved towards Belgrade along the valley of the Sava, probably in concomitance with Hungarian units, if the government of Budapest had joined to invites to collaborate.

The part asked Italy consisted in four points: an massive offensive

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

departing from the Julia front on 12 April with objective the line Spalato - Jaice⁽¹²⁾, in order protect the flank of the German army proceeding towards the capital; an offensive, to close arm more, launch from Albania towards Skoplje in order to lighten the analogous Germanic effort from Bulgaria; a naval operation aiming to the destruction the of Yugoslavian navy; the resumption of the offensive against the Greek troops, to only put into effect itself in the moment in which it, for the successful annihilation of Yugoslavia, it could have given the certainty to carry out itself in full load until to the Peloponnese, in contemporaneousness with the List army. Line of separation between Italians and Germans, the chain of the Pindo. In the light of these events, in Libya did not have to be do anything until 20 May, yes to induce English to transport forces to Greece, then would have been delivered an offensive with limited objective.

The Italian answer it was of substantial adhesion: Italy would have given the way to the aerial and naval operations to the beginning of the hostilities from part of the Germany. The preferred date was the 2 or 3 April, however was wishing that the German penetration on Skoplje was developed jointly general wings offensive, in order to reduce the time elapsing between the beginning of the hostilities and the approach of the Germanic troops to Albania. He was in fact indispensable that these hurried their march on Dibra, being the great difficulty, from part of the Comando Superiore, to prepare one quick column in conditions for heading on Skoplje. For Albania it had been decided that all the units that could be taken from the south front came under way to north and east, to defense of the Scutarino, of Kukes and the course of the black Drin. It was available of being able to oppose the forces already moving towards the Yugoslavian frontier six divisions reinforced from non divisional troops. For the Julia frontier, where already five divisions were found and an alpine group, was thought of being able to complete concentration of others six or seven divisions before 15 April.

Naturally, after this contact was made, the line of conduct in Albania became simpler and in the consequent dispatch of Mussolini to Cavallero every offensive intention definitively seemed to be cancelled with the assumption of attended a defensive general attitude in of the German initiative:

"It is clear - Mussolini wrote - that entering in war against the Axis and therefore joining its military to the forces of Greece, the Yugoslavia will try

12) For the operations on the Giulion Front it is sent down to the book of the S.M.E., Historical Uff., *Le operazioni delle unità italiane in Jugoslavia* (1941-1943), Rome 1978.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

to attack us to the flank and rear stop It is therefore urgently necessary to prepare ours defense and to resist for the time being necessary for Germany, which will attack from the east all guidelines of Uskub in order to join with us stop

Such period is estimated in ten- fifteen days stop While I send urgently the *Messina*, proposed remove from the south front two divisions in order that to carry to six that deploy on the north front in adding to the non-divisional elements that you will increase if possible stop

Size is delicate but necessary stop the front more strongly must assist that more weak & in more puts into effect the threatened situation stop must above all that the men - from the first one to the last one - are truly - be really decide to resist to the end, that is until to when the Germanic competition resolves the situation".⁽¹³⁾

Cavallero had been put to the current by Guzzoni of the note exchange with von Rintelen and of the fact that, for how much the Yugoslavia feelings were decidedly hostile to the Axis, the new chief of general staff, Gen. Jankovic, had declared the Italian military attaché who the new government wished to remain in relationships of friendship with Italy and Germany, ready but to make the war if it had been attacked. Undoubtedly, therefore, an immediate danger did not exist and for this moment of attended Cavallero it was profiting for one fast inspection to the frontier. To the telegram of the Duce his answered to have already recovered three divisions of infantry (*Florence, Puglie and Arezzo*), one alpine (*Cuneense*) and one armored (*Centauro*), not that three regiments of cavalry and the grouping "*Agostini*". He could not more remove anything from the 11th Army "*where I await an important enemy effort towards Tepeleni*".

In the afternoon of the 31st a German military mission, guided by Lt. Col. Spath, was introduced to Tirana in order to expose the German plan with greater particular and to feel what the Comando Superiore mmand Albania could do. Before the question of the head mission regarded the duration from the resistance ability. Cavallero assured that in order at least a month there were no problems: since the following day the device of safety to the frontiers already would have been in place and the more dangerous direction, that one of Librazhd, were controlled by well organized obstructions. Plus, but, it was not possible to make for the persistent delicacy of the field of Tepeleni, than it did not allow to follow that front. The Lt. Col. Spath asked which value the Greeks attribute to Tepeleni. "*It is their point of honor*" explained Cavallero and added that

13) DSCS, tele. 7626/op. dated 29.3.1941

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

he meant to hold the area "*at all costs, and for this I cannot pull here via nothing; they are already in the conditions that I cannot neither make an more important action from Berat in order to lighten their pressure on Tepeleni*". The mission head was interested then in the *Centauro*, of which the Germans they would evidently have appreciate a push for Skoplje in order to overcome their encounter, but the *Centauro* already was mortgaged for the defense of Scutari, of which the possession for obvious international reasons of prestige was wanted to be conserved. "*Finally - concluded Cavallero - there is reduced, with the criterion the but that the last position is good until that it is not occupied; I know weit die Stellung nie besetzen haben; wann sich haben es besetzen es gilt nicht mehr*"⁽¹⁴⁾. Then he left that the mission was accompanied to visit the boarder to the north of lake of Ohrida.

2. THE DEFENSIVE PHASE IN THE FIELD OF THE XVII CORPS.

In the last days of March the skeleton of the defense against the Yugoslavia had come to define itself. At first, as it was unavoidable, it had been be a matter of the simple rearrangement of the cover entrusted to the Guard to the frontier (Gen. Rivolta), to whose orders on the operations plan were also the units of the Carabinieri and the Financial police moved to the border. The organization of the cover was based on four land sectors (Scutari, Kulës, Pishkopiye, Librazhd) and two coastal (Alessio and Burizani).

He examined, in the meantime, the elements of the strategic problem momentarily available, Cavallero had given the first orders then, taken action of the German intentions and on the base of the guidelines of Mussolini, he integrated them with directives n. 24⁽¹⁵⁾ With these, premised that it was essentially dealt to earn time without to lose land, confirm the defensive conception: to hold the zone of Scutari for its high moral and political value, beyond that military; to resist in the Kossovo and the region of Pishkopiye (line of the Drin); to only block the accesses from the Dibrano to the river basins of the Skumbini and the Arzen. Consequently, they came opposite: the *Centauro* Arm. Div. at the Podgorica-Scutari director; a regiment of the *Puglie* Inf. Div. to the director of the Kossovo; the bulk of the *Puglie*, with the Lancers of *Aosta*,

14) Cavallero diary, date 31.3.1941. "far never occupy the position have; when do not have it to occupy it applies itself any longer"

15) DSCSFAA, f. 04427/op. dated 31.3.1941.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

to the Pishkopije-Kruja director; the *Firenze* Inf. Div. and the Lancers of *Milano* to the director Dibra - Librazhd.

The *Cuneense* Alp. Div. constituted unit of maneuver of the XIV Corps, while in reserve of the Comando Superiore they remained the *Messina*, in course of affluence, and the "Agostini" grouping. The subject was completed with the imminent arrival of a new Command of Corps, XVII⁽¹⁶⁾, the destined one to control all the northern and northeastern sector; the XIV Corps would have had, instead, the responsibility of the eastern sector under protection of Tirana. More to the south, the 9th Army had to organize the sector of Librazhd against the penetrations from the Dibrano and Struga. The region of Librazhd covered a fundamental importance, jackets covered the back of the 9th Army, blocked also the approached to it on Tirana and constituted hinge of the entire defense towards the Yugoslavia. Naturally, the device in issue, characterized from blocks of forces widely spaced out, it imposed the maximum exploratory activity is on the border is, and still more, in the intervals, being to preview that the enemy would have adopted the infiltration tactics through the passages more and less impervious watched. On the adversary, the information supplied from the S.I.M. at the end of March indicated in Montenegro or two active divisions and one in reserve, formed in the 2nd army, for a total of 30-40.000 men and 19 batteries; while in the Kossovo and the Dibrano they turned out two active divisions, one in reserve and four *odred* (units of the order of the mixed brigade), framed in the 3rd army, for total 90,000 men and 40 batteries. Although how much the government Yugoslavia had left to believe that Greek and to Eden, the general mobilization still had not been put into effect, therefore it was be a matter of a susceptible device of modifications, as in fact it happened.

The morning of 1 April reached the directives of Mussolini for the operations against the Yugoslavia:

"The new created situation in Yugoslavia impose to the Axis to act immediately against the Yugoslavia in order to eliminate it, therefore of having the indispensable safety to the flank for being able to then operate against Greece. I reserve myself to specify day X in which the hostilities will have beginning, but is probably imminent.

It is presumable that the Yugoslavia concentrates all its efforts offensives on Albania.

16) Command XVII C.A. - already Commando of the armored C.A., with the *Ariete* and *Littorio* Arm. Div. and Trento and Trieste Mot. Div. -- from 1 March one had moved to Calabria, having framed the *Marche* and *Pistoia* Inf. Div, with task of coastal defense. On 31 March received the order to leave immediately for Albania.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Following are previewed set in German action: day X from Bulgaria in direction of Salonico through Yugoslavian territory; day X or X + 1 from Bulgaria in direction of Uskub and, as soon as feasible, towards Dibra and Kossovo; day X + 9 from the Stiria for the valley of the Sava on Belgrade and in direction Celje- Lubiana- Kocevje-Ogulin.

The group armed of Albania must assume defensive attitude on all the foreheads, until to when, develop the German actions, is not possible to change attitude. The resistance, is on the Greek front that on that one Yugoslavian, must be understanding to the bitter end. Particularly sensitive to the Yugoslavian front, the features near the lake of Ohrida, in correspondence of Dibra and that one of Scutari.

The 2nd armed must assure the defense of the Julia frontier; offensive preparation tending to the Spalato-Jaice front (...)⁽¹⁷⁾.

The problems that Cavallero had to resolve with urgency were more of one: first of all the issue of Scutari, in the second place the logistic situation regarding the new alignment and to the ulterior increment of forces (beyond to the Messina had been decided the dispatch of the *Marche*). For Scutari many doubts did not exist, but, knowing as difficulties of defensive front could rise to what it could be imagined as the Yugoslavian main effort, the Comandante Superiore preferred to be endured much luminosity and to give specific orders to the XIV Corps (Gen. Vecchi), than of it he had the responsibility, and to the XVII (Gen. Pafundi), that he had to replace:

"To confirmation of how much sanctioned with directives n. 24, He specify that the city of Scutari is held at *ant cost*. This task must constitute a engagement of honor for the XIV C.A. and - to happened insertion - of the XVII C.A. And as are presumable that the adversary will make every effort in order to get hold of this important objective, whose name has immense resonance, are necessary to organize at Scutari the firmest defense (...)⁽¹⁸⁾.

In the hypothesis that the adversary succeeded to exceed the Drin - Bojana river line and to ring the defense of Scutari, these could and had resist in place, waited for of being blocked from mobile forces. The necessity of impress the quickest rhythm derived some, considering the narrow limits of time, to the works in order to increase the robustness of the defensive town-walls.

17) DSCS, tele. 7740/op. dates 31.3.1941. The message was addressed to Gen. Cavallero in quality of Comandante Superiore Albanian Armed Forces - rather than like chief of General Staff - and to the chiefs of general staff of the three Armed Forces.

18) DSCSF AA, f. 04474/op. dated 1.4.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

In logistic field the Quartermaster Scuero synthesized the availability: 20 days of provisions, of which the half of reserve; 4 insufficient units of fire; sufficient fuel supplies. Still deficiency for means of transport, but alleviative through the private vehicles: the Cafulli enterprise was disposed to find in Italy another 300 trucks and to make to send them. There was also an aspect particular to examine: the Albanian units. After the withdrawal from the forehead of the Albanian battalions, it was proceeded to their dissolution nearly total, but the active insistences of the Representative Jacomoni had induced Cavallero to reorder the units, constituting the *Scanderbeg* regiment on four irregular Bns. and, more recently, some bands. Still they had not been uses you in combat, but now the circumstances made to think to they useful employment. Albanian legion M.V.S.N. came posted to disposition of the XVII Corps in order to act in the Scutarino, two battalions of the *Scanderbeg* Regt. was assigned to the coastal defense and the irregular bands in charge to operate to the frontier against infiltrations of analogous groups⁽¹⁹⁾. Moreover he could himself be counted on the cc.nn. "Diamanti" grouping. Constituted on six battalions, it was lacking in a minimum of autonomy⁽²⁰⁾, but reinforced with unit of accompaniment, means of connection and artillery it could carry out a role adapted in the sphere of the XVII Corps.

For how much Cavallero was engaged personally in the most intense activity, revolt also to issues not always of his grip of relevance, the picture that was realizing had many zones of shadow. From the news on the next enemy it was gained that the aggressive intentions Yugoslavia were of preference addressed towards Albania, than the beginning of the hostilities was imminent, than the first attack it would have been delivered against Scutari. All discounted. Of other part, the availability of forces and the amplitude of the fields excluded of being able to constitute a continuous alignment and, consequently, they obligated to block the more delicate lines of facilitation, limiting the control of remaining to measures of simple surveillance. This concept,

19) To frame the irregular Bottai was called, commander of the *Vicenza* alpine Bn., in his duty as "Inspector of the Albanian Irregular Troops".

20) In a talk with Cavallero, Lt. Gen. Diamanti little comforting situation illustrated one much: the grouping had 2,600 men and they therefore lacked about 1,400; its legions, were those of the *Puglie*, the *Pinerolo* and *Bari*; the senior officials, for the greater part, did not demonstrate themselves up to their assignment; one company lacked machine-gunners; it was lacking in artillery; it had had to leave behind the telegraphers and handicraftsmen platoons and the medical section; it was even lacking in the Chief of the G.S. (Cavallero Diary).

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

also obvious, became not simple application in two cases; whereas the shapes of the land were opened to favor of the enemy, that it happened in the ridge of Dibra and the Scutarino; and when a mass sturdy lacked and mobile maneuver to rear, that it was taken place in those the first days of April.

While Gen. von Rintelen had arrived at Tirana, joining the German military mission. Place to the current of the adopted measures, he supplied more recent particular of the operating design of the O.K.W., observing that of the Yugoslavia guiding efforts along the two most dangerous ones, that one of the east would have been automatically lightened by the German attack that in three days would have reached Skoplje ⁽²¹⁾, while not equally it would have happened for the northern action. And he added: "*Provided that not abandoned Tepeleni? You would save forces for the noted requirement*". The same question had been formulated previously also by Lt. Col. Spath, but is from thinking that the question mark has been made without much conviction: it was easy, in fact, for Cavallero to demonstrate that, to part the international resonance of the loss of Tepeleni, the abandonment of the Golico and the Beshishtit or the Bus Devrit would have carried, as unavoidable consequence, the impossibility to hold the Shendeli and the Kurvelesh, after that the open gash would have absorbed all the troops recovered from the salient, for reached in defensive conditions gets worse because without more pillars available much, Gen. von Rintelen convene on the retort and agreed in thinking, to made accounts, Scutari as more sensitive point. On this general subject the unit of opinions existed, but the points of view diverged with respect to the modality for the defense of the field. The German military attaché, in fact, went to Scutari in order to observe the characteristics of the zone, had a talk with Gen. Pizzolato, commander of the *Centauro*, and expressed the convincement that the better resistance was that river Bojana-Drin and that therefore to want to hold the city it would have lead to an expensive employment of the few forces available, and for more useless, being easy to go around Scutari and to isolate it. Gen. Pizzolato, than quite was oriented to push a lot ahead the defense, so as to oppose delayed resistances with armored elements, rejected decidedly the opinion of the host, which sufficiently solid reaction in the Scutarino returned to Rome evidently with some reserves on the concrete possibilities to carry out one.

21) Cavallero commented in his diary: "*The action on Uskub seems to me made more in order protect their right flank rather than to lighten our front*".

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Come to acquaintance of these doubts of Guzzoni he spoke with Mussolini, substantially sharing the concept to abandon Scutari and the border strip and to organize a knitted defense to the end on the Drin. It was outside place, he thought, to expose oneself to a wearing down prematurely that it could also compromise the possibilities of obstruction of the Podgorica - Durazzo director, when the task - already accepted - was simply to earn one ten of days. Persuaded Mussolini and was ordered to by telephone at Tirana in order to orient the Comando Superiore explicitly: to avoid that considerations of moral character in contrast with requirements of military order prevailed. If thought opportune on the tactical plan, the city had to be abandoned, therefore like the Comando Supremo had decided to make for Fiume and Zara. In such case it was necessary to immediately carry out a delaying action and of wearing down to north of the line Bojana river – Drin river, line on which the position of resistance, held had to be implanted for the moment the *Centauro* and entrusting then, once feasible, to the *Messina*, in order to recover and to hold to the hand in reserve the armored division. In the second place all had to be persuaded that "*the fates of the war are decided in Albania*", where absolutely had to hold for the necessary ten of days so that the army of Gen. List made to feel the weight on the Yugoslav forces. "*It seems that Gen. von Rintelen has brought back the impression that does not know this*"⁽²²⁾. In the night reached the expectable telegram of Mussolini:

"Considered if in relation forces available it is convenient to entrust the north defense Scutarino & Tarabosh to only the elements of the Guard frontier that will have to resist to the last on the positions they are entrusted but to deploy instead divisions on left the rivers Drin and Bojana in order to prevent to enemy passage much this obstacle considerable & lend well at defended stop This brings accordingly defense renouncement to the last Scutari city of high moral value stop. But it is certain that never as hour the other in order that military considerations must prevail on all to put to us in the military conditions in order to resist necessary time so that progress German action is made to feel on flank & on the back of the new enemy advance stop Communicate your decisions to me".⁽²³⁾

Cavallero waited to answer. Just that day had arrived a communication of the Comando Supremo, according to which the O.K.W. also did not have still fixed the date of beginning of the operations being by now issue of days, and, an hour after the message

22) Cavallero diary, date 5.4.1941.

23) DSCS, tele 7907/op. dated 5.4.1941, hours 20,10.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of Mussolini, he had another from Gen. Guzzoni: in the first hours of the next day, 6 April, Germany would have opened the hostilities. Taken action of that, one was about to obey to the Duce, also maturing a strongly mental reserve: "*Renunciation at to hold Scutari simplifies the defense task stop Orient my action according to Your directives (...)*" and, in coming down in particular, he added that it thought opportune to confirm the delaying task entrusted to armored units from the frontier to the Drin. Then he meet with Gen. Pafundi, commander of the XVII Corps⁽²⁴⁾, put it to the current of the change of operating address and finally it circulated directives n. 25⁽²⁵⁾, with which he fixed the line of conduct for the northern frontier:

"As a result of varying part taken in the fixed situation, tasks in the directives n. 24 partially are changed in the sense that in the zone of Scutari the line of resistance to the end is determined from the Drin-Bojana water course, and that, in the before zone to such line, delaying action extended the how much most possible one will have to be carried out. This delaying action, to which I attribute the maximum importance, will be leaned to the positions of the grip of Wukpalaj let alone to successive lines of arrest to predispose and to complete.

Assigned for now to the XVII C.A. in adding to the "Diamanti" cc.nn. Regt., already started in zone Puka, the Messina Inf. Div. and the Forest militia Regt. (...)".

As it can be observed, the Comandante Superiore avoided to speak about *abandonment* of Scutari and, with emphasizing that the delaying action in front of the L.R. had to be *extended as much as possible*, he betrayed the intention to fight for the city. For how much Mussolini repeated invited him to leave to lose any motivation not closely operating citing Hitler:

"In a message of the Fuhrer that has been delivered to me last night, a few hours before the beginning of the hostilities, what is said in the text follows: "*the first condition of it is succeeded that the Italian front in Albania, whichever circumstance, holds hard*" stop Is sure that at all costs that will come made"⁽²⁶⁾,

24) Gen. Pafundi arrived at Tirana by airplane with a share of his Command the evening of 2 April. At 00:00 hours of the 4th he assumed the responsibilities of northern Albania.

25) DSCSFAA, f. 04796/op. dated 6.4.1941.

26) DSCS, tele. 7942/op. dated 6.4.1941, 14:10 hours. From such message it appears enough clearly that in Berlin the fear existed that, of front to than more probable a massive Yugoslavian offensive to the flank of the Italian Armies engaged against the Greek troops, the Comando Superiore Albania did not succeed to face the event. For the truth, sliding per diem historians and correspondence of the main interested Commands, do not turn out that in Albania the situation was considered in dramatic way. Worries sure existed, but also much coldness. The worse was passed!

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Cavallero at all continued not to be convinced of the goodness of the decision to abandon Scutari and to await the action on the rivers. Of it he spoke also with Geloso which, to confirmation of his disappointment, he said him to have stated in a maneuver carried out in time of peace, just with the *Centauro*, than the medium tanks they can find useful employment in the delaying maneuver and concur to earn good time. Less still Gen Pafundi was persuaded, which, after to have given for telephone from Tirana the order to foreshadow the *Centauro* for the regression behind the Drin and to stop the *Messina*, it was separated immediately, deliberately to see of person as to arrange the things, since the war with the Yugoslavia already was begun with the aerial bombing of the airport of Scutari (already evacuated from our aircraft). The day after hurried to complete a careful recognition of the zone and after deepened examination telephoned to the Comando Superiore: *"Withdrawing we will get worse in full load our defensive conditions - he said - Only a wider regression, in Alessio zone, could carry to an improvement. Therefore they are of the opinion that must be remained in the situation in which we are and asks to remain where we are"* ⁽²⁷⁾.

The meteorological weather said one hand for the definitive solution: in order more than twenty-four hours abundant rains fell that flooded nearly completely the region, already marshy, between the Bojana and the Drinassa, hindering seriously every tactical and logistic activity.

Cavallero was giving orders on orders in order to create a system of successive arrests in the region to north of Scutari, which points of support for the troops that eventually had to flow (*"I think necessary that while the Germans are in order to enter in Uskub, we do not grant to the Serbs a name: Scutari!"*) and it accepted at once the counter proposal, but with Mussolini it wanted to proceed slowly. On the moment he telephoned *"To Scutari I have decided as You have ordered. If possible I will hold but the enemy far away (...)"*, then sent it a message:

"I have today stated that zone on the left of the two rivers Bojana & Drin is nearly totally flooded consequence yesterday & today rains stop Today stormy atmosphere makes to presume new heavy showers stop That become place impossible to line up troops in dictated to region for defense Scutari area stop Such circumstance is by me made present also from Commander army corps stop

27) Cavallero diary, date 7.4.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

That place is necessary to carry skillful resistance on the noted river heights where it is also much more profitable stop Such is provision by now rendered possible convenient & from advance state of works & availability forces stop Scutari defense therefore will be assured from delaying action exercised from units of the *Centauro* in the border strip and Kopliku region while resistance will be made on the above pointed out heights with line safety between Kopliku & Scutari stop

All the origins from the mountains that they meet towards Kopliku & Scutari is watched stop This device had been conscientiously inspired to the only considerations of military interest"⁽²⁸⁾.

And therefore closes the problem of the defense of Scutari.

In the meantime, as it has been pointed out, the hostilities with Yugoslavia were begun. The counter opposing forces on 6 April, for the part that interests the frontier Yugo-Albanian, were the following.

The XVII Corps (Gen. Pafundi) had the *Centauro* Arm. Div., of the *Messina* Inf. Div., Diamanti cc.nn. BG. plus various units. The XIV Corps (Gen. Vecchi) had the *Puglie* Inf. Div. (less a regiment), the *Cuneense* Alp. Div. and various supports. The Librazhd area (Gen. Nasci) have the *Arezzo* and *Firenze* Inf. Div. and minor units.

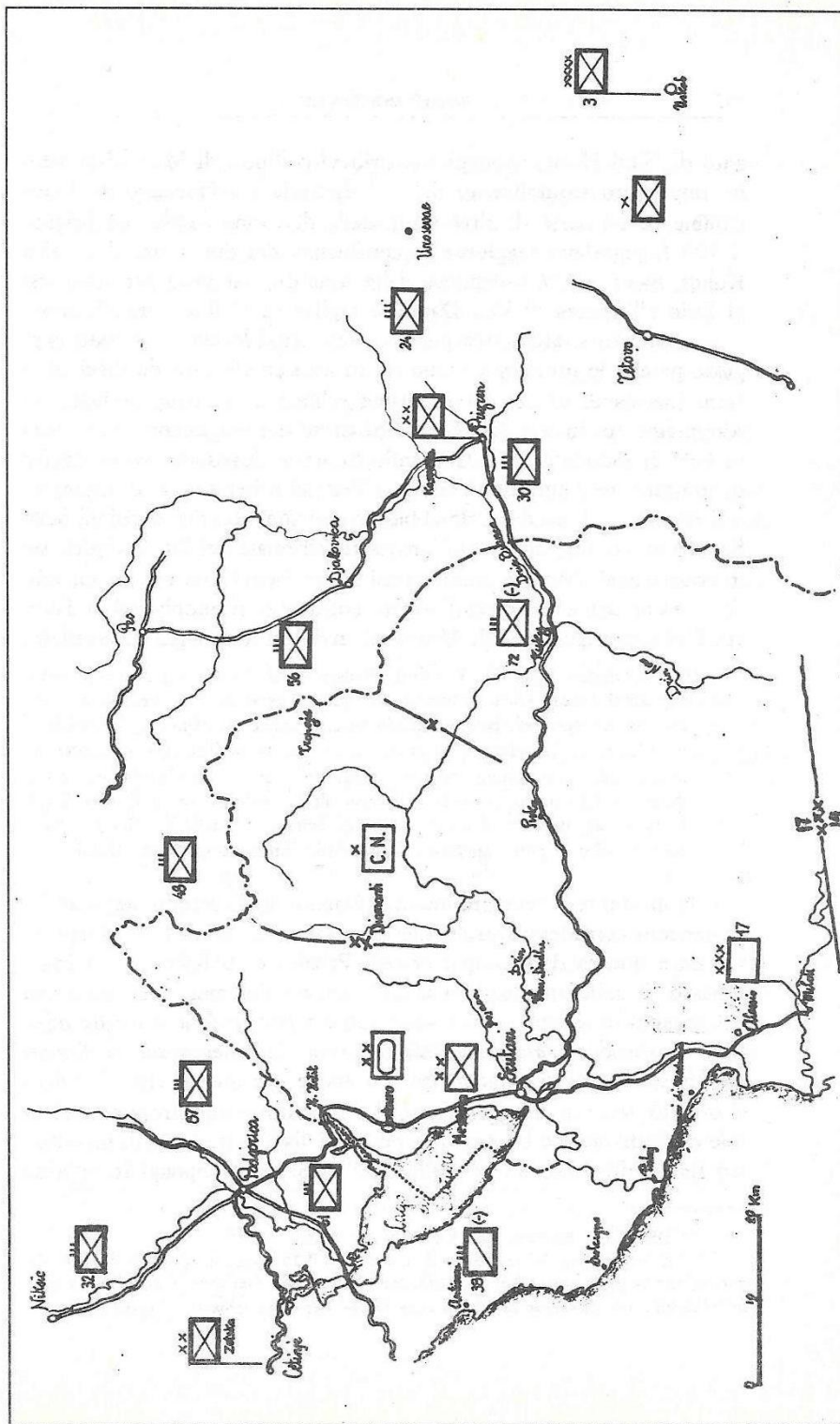
The 3rd Yugoslavian Army (Gen. Brusic) had the 15th Inf. Div. Zetska, in Montenegro; 31st Inf. Div. Kosovska reinforced in the Kossovo; the 25th Inf. Div. Vardarska reinforced in the Dibrano; a *odred* to north of Ohrida; and various supports.

In short, large way the XVII Corps had against it two divisions and two *odred*, the XIV Corps had to face one reinforced division and the field "Librazhd" a reinforced *odred*. To keep in mind that the Yugoslav divisions had an organic strength: 3 regiments of infantry with 4 battalions and a sturdy subordinate infantry-support weapons company, two regiments of artillery and smaller units.

The Gen. Pafundi could not give a definitive order to the defense that to leave from 00:00 hours of 8 April. From that moment the army corps was articulated in three fields: "Scutari" to the *Messina* Inf. Div.; "Puka" to "Diamanti" BG and "Kukës" the 72nd Inf. *Puglie* (sketch n. 106). The first enemy movements had place to the north from the tightened eastern arm of the lake of Scutari, in the zone of Hani Hotit, and astride of the White Drin towards Kulës, beyond to infiltrations of independent units or irregular groups. The defense, nearly all places of border or small garrison, withdrew slowly. But in the turn of forty eight hours the situation began to define itself more clearly: the advanced alignment

28) Cavallero Diary, date 7.4.1941.

LO SCHIERAMENTO DEL XVII CORPO D'ARMATA L'8 APRILE



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of Hani Hotit, supported to the hilly relief's of M. Malsit, came threatened frontal engagement from the 61st infantry and of encirclement from part of other units of the *Zetska* division; to the east the Yugoslav 30th Inf. reached the confluence of the two Drin, in front of Kulës, while the 56th came down from the zone of Djakovica in order to attest themselves to the Drin to the height of Vau Dadhe and to cut outside the field "Kulës".

Cavallero attended this beginning, indeed he had thought worse because the forecasts were of an attack delivered by ten Yugoslav divisions, about which six in the first formation and four, derived from splitting, in the second. None but parts of the regiments was still in assembled phase of and the High Yugoslav command had decided to move three major unit against the Germans. Therefore, all adding, he thought the line of the Drin enough sure, with two divisions in the Scutarino, six cc.nn. btg. on the northern arc of the Drin and others six in the Kulës zone. While these first events had place, German units of the XIV Army Corps entered Skoplje and Tetovo. In the afternoon of the 8th, Mussolini sent a message to Cavallero:

" German advance on Uskub diminishes if it does not completely remove worries Okrida-Dibrano field stop These worries still remain on the north front, comprising in it also origins from Kulës & from Tropoja stop In relation at this examined possibility to facilitate ulterior German action aiming with troop moved for Okrida-Dibrano zone in Kicevo direction or for Gostivar stop If it is the considered case to strengthen mainly the north front in order to avoid in that direction audacity blows, will say more, deprive of hope to you, of the enemy in the south direction towards Durazzo".⁽²⁹⁾

In spite of the obvious derangement of Yugoslavian Army⁽³⁰⁾ still an attack on Scutari was considered probable. On 11 April, in the debit news of the occupation of Prizren and Kicevo, the German official of connection with the 12th Army with Mar. List perceived the Comando Superiore Albania: "*the main attack of the Yugoslavian Army attends in direction Scutari- Tirana. The line to south of Scutari would be from keeping itself absolutely*". It was also for that Cavallero was oriented towards a lightening of the device on the eastern frontier from Pishkopiye to Librazhd, to favor of the constitution of a sturdy defensive flank to east of the city of Scutari, supported to the handle

29) DSCS, tele. 8009/op. dated 8.4.1941, hours 17,20.

30) A telegram of Gen. Simovic, intercepted the 10 April, was expressed in eloquent way: "*the troops in withdrawn must fight in all the directions towards which they have contact with the enemy not awaiting for any order. You regulate according to personal initiative*".

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

of the Drin, the strengthening of the existing obstructions in correspondence of the upper Drin and the Black Drin and a quick obstruction at Alessio. But they were worried that were revealed superfluous. The 13th and 14th the *Zetska* division attacked with how much had at hand without to succeed to obtain any result: the energetic reaction of the *Centauro* and in especially of the tank battalions inflicted serious losses to the adversary (sketch 107), that it had to desist from the effort. By now one was to the end.

At 19:00 of 14 April a German patrol to the official command it reached Kulës and made contact with the 72nd infantry. Already the command of the XVII Corps, on guideline of the Comando Superiore, was taking the measures in order to pass to the offensive not as soon as the arrest of the opposing pressure was outlined on Scutari⁽³¹⁾. Seen the course of the operations Gen. Pafundi ordered to the *Messina* to push the units of 94th infantry to the border in the Tarabosh area. The morning of the 15th Cavallero was informed by Mussolini that the Yugoslavia had asked the armistice and this induced him to break off the delay, any Yugoslavia force still tried to come down on Scutari. Went immediately to Miloti, he conferred with the commander of the XVII Corps and he ordered it to begin the advance decidedly, even if the situation was anything but clear, breaking off the enemy resistances and heading at Cattaro and Ragusa from two sides of the lake of Scutari; therefore it continued for Scutari, where order to Gen. Pentimalli, commander of the *Marche* - just arrived -, to move the division to the continuation of the *Centauro*, heading at Ragusa through Montenegro, without to care of what could happen on the exposed flank. Spintosi still more to north, towards 13:00 joined the *Centauro* at Kopliku. He found Gen. Pizzolato in talk with Gen. Petrovit, commander of the *Zetska* division, who had been introduced fortified of full powers and probative documents for dealing an armistice. Cavallero at first rejected the demand, dealing itself for issue that had to be defined to the maximum level, then made to answer

31) Unknown to the Comando Superiore Albania the S.I.M. it was taken part in the Yugoslavian radio net transmitting two coded messages. To the *Zetska* division "it ordered": "*the dependent troops suspend every offensive action stop are withdrawn in direction of Podgorica organizing itself to defense stop general Simovic*" and the *Kosovska* division: "*You withdraw yourselves at once with all employee troops in direction Kosovska Mitrovica stop general Simovic*". The next day, at dawn, the two divisions will receive an apocryphal number other with which it came asked "*received*" for the previous message; the text of the *order* was reliable, dates the circumstances and the moment, but the *Zetska* division, that it was attacking to Scutari, remained much uncertain one and to the end it asked confirmation of the received dispositions to Sarajevo. The morning of the 15th Sarajevo answered that "*no withdraw had been ordered*".

The Greek Campaign

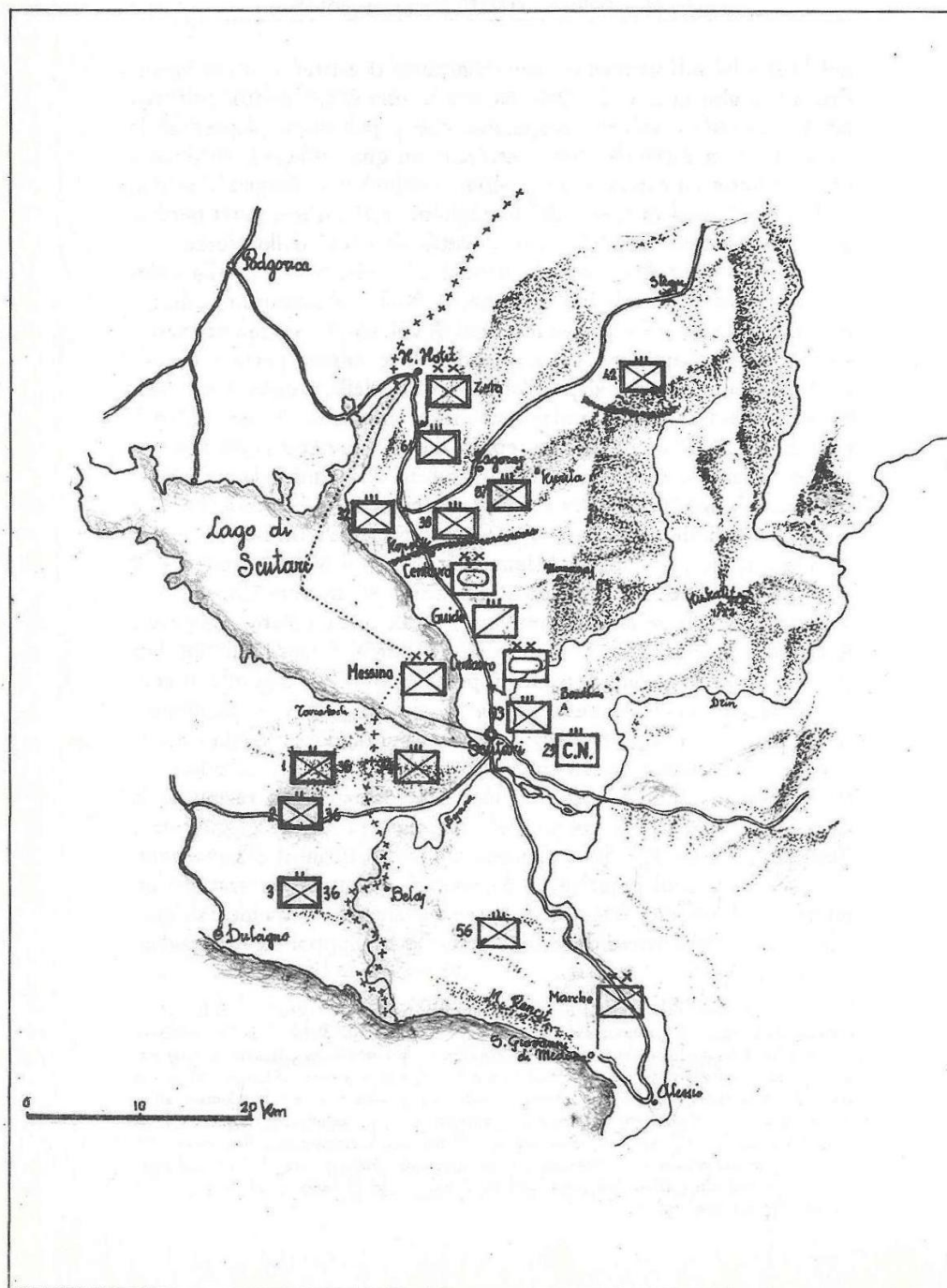
Chapter 14

Page 694

Situation in the Scutario on 13 April

Schizzo n. 107

LA SITUAZIONE NELLO SCUTARINO IL 13 APRILE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

that, at least, the Yugoslav troops withdrew while until the border. Gen. Petrovic objected not to have the faculty to concur and of having to re-enter in order to put itself in communication with own advance, and asked, for converged, than during these contacts they came temporary suspended the hostilities. Refused the truce, the parliamentarians withdrew themselves.

While the instructions asked of urgency Rome were late to arrive, the Commander of the XVII Corps circulated the orders for the occupation of the Mouths of Cattaro and Ragusa. He dealt himself to advance quickly on two columns preceded from strong quick vanguards in order to sweep up any resistance. The left column of (south) under the orders of Gen. Zani, was composed from the *Messina* reinforced from a group of the 21st artillery; that one of right (north), commanded by gen. Pentimalli, was constituted by the *Centauro*, the *Marche* and the *Cavalleggeri Guide*. He objected initially, respective Antivari and Danilovgrad. To rear, replacing in the jurisdiction of the XVII Corps the "Scutari area Command" (Gen. Jacoe) under the direct dependencies of the Comando Superiore. In the afternoon elements of the *Messina* were pushed at once to the border, exceeding it and rejecting the insufficient local resistances. At 18:50 also in this stretch of the front a parliamentarian with a white flag introduced himself here and also, ahead to the injunction of Gen. Zani to withdraw of three kilometers in waited for of the advanced answer, the thing remained in suspended. Towards 20:00 Mussolini only telephoned to Cavallero informing him that the negotiations of armistice would have been carried out from the central Authorities. The day after, 16 April, the advance continued. The resistances were rare, the more important obstacles the interrupted bridges. At 10:30 Gen. Popovic introduced to the commander of the vanguard of the north column, Col. Guidetti, to which he communicated that, having stated the downfall of the Yugoslavian army and in order to avoid further spilling of blood, meant to ask instructions of own Command in order to obtain the authorization to withdraw the units. Gen. Pizzolato, arrived on the scene in the meantime, supported the proposal - also in order to allow with the bridge engineers to exceed the interruption of the bridge of Hani Hotit with a bridge of boats and supports of the capacity of 8 tons - and specified that in all the cases at 15:00 it would have resumed the advance towards Podgorica. At 13:30 Gen. Popovic received the order let pass the Italian columns and to put down the arms. The 17th, in the late morning, the *Messina* occupied Cattaro and Cetinje and the *Centauro*, always followed by the *Marche*, exceeded Niksic entered at 13:30 Ragusa. At 18:00 approximately the vanguard of the truck-borne army corps

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

(Gen. Zingales) coming from the Gulia front, also reached Ragusa ⁽³²⁾. The 18 April Gen. Guzzoni communicated: "the Yugoslavian Armed Forces surrendered stop the capitulation will go into effect today at 12:00 hours".

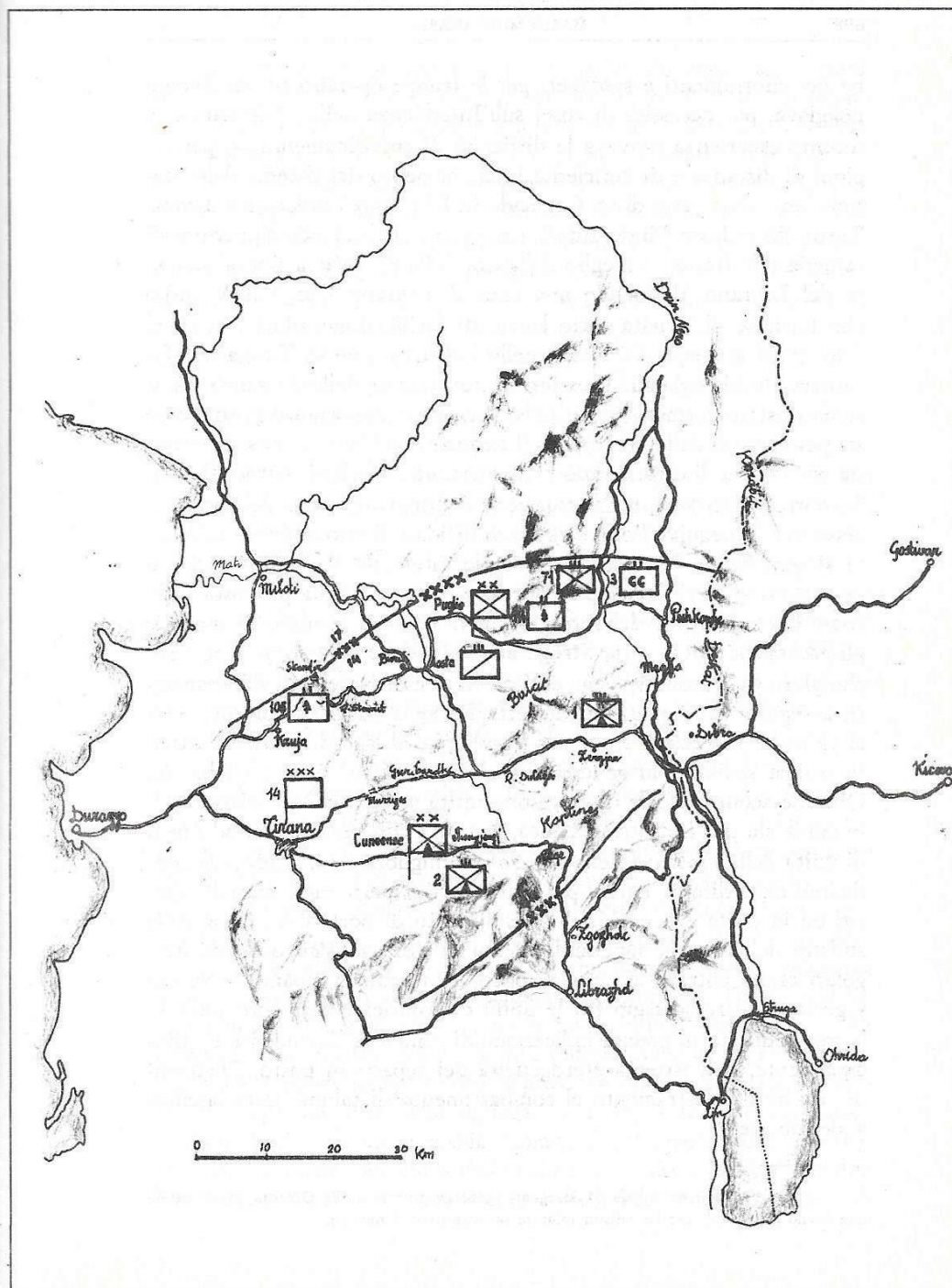
3. THE OFFENSIVE PHASE TO THE EASTERN FRONTIER.

On 5 April the XIV Army corps was deployed to the eastern frontier of Albania, in a field that on the border had an amplitude of a some thirty of kilometers, but to back it was quickly increased. The guidelines to block were two (Pishkopije-Kruja and Dibra-Tirana) with only one origin: the ridge of Dibra. The long bar of Korabit and the Deshat, whose summits exceed the 2000 meters of altitude, covered in fact nearly all the field little leaving single space for some infiltration weight. The possibility of a penetration existed also that from the zone of Kukes it went back the Black Drin, but the greater danger was perceived to the extreme south, where the ridge of Dibra - from which a third director left moreover, on Librazhd, in the field of the Nasci army corps - could not at a distance be controlled (sketch 108). Therefore Cavallero had given to Gen. Vecchi very precise directives: to guarantee the inviolability of the Drin in order to watch the ways on Tirana. Then, in particular, he had to observe to Gen. Battisti the necessity of gravitate relatively with the defense towards ahead, without to let to attract too much from also the necessary rear obstruction of Shengjergji. Withdrawing, the *Cuneense* would have uncovered smaller tactical ways and the inner flank of the lateral units.

To south of the XIV Corps it had been constituted the field "Librazhd". Initially it had been be a matter simply of a put into effect defensive flank, on order of the III Corps, from the *Arezzo* Inf. Div. with the 226th infantry and the 4th bersaglieres in order to close with one strip of fire, integrated by anti-tank defense, the zone easier penetration astride of the Struga-Q. Thane axis. The provision, however, did not seem adapted to Gen. Pirzio Biroli in order more reasons. The line of Yugoslavian penetration Dibra-Strebilova- Librazhd, first of all, interested the 9th Army directly because whichever threat to the roadway Librazhd - Kukes affected the only logistic axis of the III Corps. Moreover the organization

32) The bulletin n. 316 of 18-4-1941 erroneously attributed the occupation of Ragusa to the 2nd Army.

IL SETTORE DEL XIV CORPO IL 5 APRILE



The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

of the supply and evacuations for the operating troops in Raponi valley rested, for necessity of things, on the Intendancy of the 9th Army and the recent experience it tried the difficulties of coordination - for reasons of distance and deficient operation of the system of the transmissions - from part of a Command (the XIV Corps) located at Tirana. All that induced Pirzio Biroli to propose the Comando Superiore to extend the front, or better the flank, of the 9th Army until to the salient with the Dibrano, defining a line of contact with the XIV Corps that left to the army all the facilitation ways adducing to the Raponi vallet and to the Army corps those addressed towards Tirana for Q. Murrizes and Shengjergji. The northern field of the 9th Army, that it would have been formed in such a way, it covered pre-eminent importance is for the entity of the effort that the enemy could have developed, is for the organization work to exercise. Since the Devoli area - Tomorreces lost, in the contingent situation, leaves of its interest, of it achieved the opportunity to entrust the new feature of the front to Gen. Nasci, leaving the interim command of the XXVI Corps Gen. Santovito. The Comando Superiore convene on the proposal and arranged the constitution of the "N" army corps with the task to block the accesses from Dibra and from Struga to they of the Skumbini valley. For some day there were movements of unit and modifications of alignments, as a result of recognitions of detail in the strip of border. Until to the day of the 8th on all the front from Peshkopije to the lake of Ohrida war activities it was limited in kind to skirmishes of patrols and raids. Some local actions of greater entity was taken place in the "Librazhd" field both for enemy initiative, rejected with losses, and to work of unit of *Firenze* and the *Arezzo* in order to improve on the border the conditions of the defense. All the places of - frontier but had been lightened and in part it evacuated, in the understanding to carry the defense on the left of the Drin, and, exceeding some of them, *granicari* or irregular bands were entering, it is also little, in Albanian territory. A sure uneasiness between the units of frontier, deriving perhaps in part from defect of precise indication of tasks and dependencies and, mainly, from the extreme heterogeneity of the units in place was followed some. However, also the training to the combat of some units left to wish⁽³³⁾.

33) Among other things, the 81 mm mortars assigned a few days before to the Guard to the frontier were not usable because no soldier knew the employment.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

The German advance said an abrupt blow of rudder to the events. Gen. Simovic had, yes, with an overthrow coup d'état a psychologically intolerable situation to the mass of the Yugoslavia, but while the political exponents and the people let to go to a dangerous euphoria, it was anything but that decided on the conduct line following: he knew that the Croats did not have the same hostile feelings to the Axis of the Serbs. He knew that on the U.S.S.R. there was not from making confidence; in fact, rather than to reach to a military pact, after some conversations Stalin was limited to concur to a platonic "treaty of friendship and non-aggression" (6 April). He knew that on a military aid consisting - just what it was necessary - from British part there was very little from hoping. It knew that Greece totally was engaged and exhausted on the Albanian theater. It knew that the *cursed Huns*, as Churchill called them, meant to resolve the Balkan issue quickly. It knew, finally, that if attacked it would have fought, but the Yugoslavia would have been broken and dismembered. After all, it hoped to succeed to remain neutral, also not making many illusions. While feverish mobilization. From the other side, the Germany had seen to be shipwrecked the initial plan, but then it was not difficult to adapt it to the circumstances: it collected new unit in the area, it removed two Commanders of army corps and six divisions to the block prepared for operation *Barbarossa* and feeling sure to sweep up the new adversary. Probably Hitler, on one side gave to the Yugoslavian military possibilities a advanced credit to the truth and feared strongly a concentric and fatal attack on Albania, from the other he perceived the necessity to liquidate at once Yugoslavia in order to avoid that a slow and methodical offensive could get involved in mountains of the Serbia and the Bosnia. In effects Gen. Simovic did not think neither to a withdraw, volunteer or not, in inner the mountainous regions in order to try to maneuver for inner lines from that base or in order to give to life to a guerrilla war in great style. The operations plans previewed the defense of all the frontiers, that it carried to the consequence of a easy pierceable form of alignment. However it must recognize that, the wrong or not defensive conception, to change the plans *in extremis* was hypothesis from not being able itself to take in serious consideration and to abandon at once the province Slovenian and Croatian and Macedonian - in order not to say of the capital - would have had easy imaginable political repercussions. However, the Yugoslavian government hoped until 6 April, Palm Sunday. A little after the 5 of the morning operation Punishment loosed himself against Belgrade, according to the order of

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Hitler. It lasted two days. At the same time, from Bulgaria the 12th Army with Mar. List attacked towards the West with the XL Corps (Gen. Stumme): 7 April-the 9th Pz. Div. entered Skoplje; the evening of the 8th Nis was occupied, the second city of the Serbia.

Cavallero comprised the possibility and the opportunity to exceed the border in the Dibrano in order to encounter the Germans. Obviously it would not have been one resolute move because the forces lacked, but above all the means: tanks, artilleries and motor vehicles; however it would have had a remarkable moral meaning. The morning of the 8th he telephoned to Pizio Biroli, to which it had given a regiment of the *Pinerolo* as reserve for the "Librazhd" area: "*Eastwards* - he said - *with the means that you have to advance towards Struga or the south. You do with what you have*". In the afternoon, known that also Tetovo had been taken by the German vanguards, made to telephone to the 9th Army giving to *Firenze* and to the *Cuneense* the warning of advance on Dibra, to their orders of Gen. Nasi. Gen. Spicacci, head of the G.S. of the 9th Army, which it had received the communication, pointed out that Gen. Nasi was engaged in an action in the field of Struga, but Cavallero confirmed, suggesting to entrust temporary this field to Gen. Ricagno and ordering at the same time to the 11th Army that all the *Pinerolo* was moved in the night to Librazhd to disposition of the 9th Army. Then it explained to Nasi:

"I have had communication that the Germans are at Tetovo and ask us to engage the enemy and to go ahead. It can not that to attack on Dibra and I have thought to entrust the action to the *Firenze* and the *Cuneense* and giving you the command and the responsibility of the attack: on Dibra and beyond (Gostivar). They ask us to engage. For us to engage wants to say to attack (...)"

Pirzio Biroli circulated endured the orders for the occupation of the ridge of Dibra and Struga and for the rearrangement of the defense on the frontier positions. The offensive was entrusted to two columns:

- column "Dibra" (Gen. Nasi), constituted by the *Cuneense*⁽³⁴⁾ Alp.Div., *Firenze* Inf. Div., *Milano* cav. rgt. and one coy. light tanks;
- column "Struga" (Gen. Ferone), formed from the *Arezzo* Inf. Div. less the 225th infantry and of the 4th bersaglieres.

The morning of the 9th the advance had begun. In Rome it was continuation with anxiety. The day before Gen. von Rintelen had introduced to the Comando Supremo copy of a telegram received from the OKW:

34) Initially only the 1st alpine, reinforced by the *Dronero* Bn. of the 2nd alpine, and the *Mondovì* group.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"The Führer asks the Duce to concur with following proposal in order to guarantee the agreement of the operations against Yugoslavia. The campaign of the Balkans is subdivided in three great stages:

1st stage: union of the Germanic forces in Bulgaria with the Italian troops in Albania. Therefore the forces of the enemy are formed into two groups: Serbian group in the north and group Greek-English in the south. For this purpose it serves the point against and beyond Skoplje. At the same time a group of Germanic forces will trigger an attack with objective limited from the zone the south-west of Bulgaria against the river basin of Salonicco, and other partial forces will penetrate into Thrace in order to reach the Aegean.

In this stage it will touch to the Italian forces in Albania to cooperate in this German zone with the advance against Skoplje and, also defending itself on the other foreheads, to stretch here you to a union with the Germanic troops advancing from the west. Since Skoplje has been occupied in the evening of 7 April from part of a Germanic armored division and since therefore the valley of Vardar is crossed, enemy pressure will not be able to be calculated for one that on the northern and southern front of Albania.

2nd stage: annihilation of the Yugoslavian Army by means of a concentric attack (...).

3rd stage: demands with respect to the common preparation of the operations against Greece will follow when the development of the situation after the concentric offensive of all the forces against Yugoslavia becomes expectable (...)"⁽³⁵⁾.

As it is seen, while first Hitler had simply demanded, indeed recommended, to hold at all costs in Albania, now, on the beginning of operations, sped up to go encounter to the German penetration on Skoplje. However, the events exceeded in rapidity the forecasts and Mussolini was a lot excited. He telephoned towards noon of the 9th Tirana communicating that the German divisions were at Prilep and three kilometers from Salonicco and that Gen. Jodl had proposed an Italian action towards Kicevo so that the Yugoslav troops could not escape towards the region of the lakes. Cavallero answered very calmly:

"We in the Dibrano attack, but we do not have neither the elements nor the speed in order to act in depth. We will do all possible, but we must hold a front of 600 kilometers and, also having towards the Yugoslavia a alignment with a minimum of forces, I do not have mass. I could not feed also because the attack on Scutari is delineating"⁽³⁶⁾.

35) Cavallero diary, date 8.4.1941.

36) Ibid, date 9.4.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

After three quarters of hour a new telephone call from Mussolini: "*Salonicco is taken; the Greek divisions have surrendered; the Hungarians are arriving at Maribor: below!*" and, known that the *Marche* were not still usable at Scutari and that in its place the *Casa* was ready, collection in the zone of Tepeleni, proposed to send it of course to the north "*a lot even if loses Tepeleni by now is not important*", Cavallero replied that he meant to conserve and Scutari and Tepeleni.

The advance preceded slowly in the two directions for difficulty of varied order, first between all the sudden passage from a defensive organization to an attack device; in the second place the poor climatic and meteorological conditions, finally strong deficiencies in the field of the connections. It is worth the pain to stop itself on the operation to demonstration, not new for the truth, of how much can be dangerous to shorten beyond lawful the organizational phase in order to obtain a result to short expiration. Received the new task Gen. Nasci immediately convened to Librazhd the commander of *Firenze* for the first dispositions, but it did not succeed to take contact with the commander of the *Cuneense*, because in recognition of the zone of Q. Murzizes. Through the Comando Superiore could only communicate directly with Col. Balocco, commander of the 1st Alpine, at Zergjan. In the night the said orders was confirmed by written. According to these (sketch n. 109) the 1st alpine had to move with its three battalions and the *Mondovì* group along the Topojani-Maqellara-Dibra direction in order to occupy the ridge of Pasina Livada, dominant the city from north, while the *Dronero* Bn., of the 2nd alpini, had as objective the bridge of hill 500 on the brin. Given the initial deployment of the units, the meeting and the starter of the *Ceva* and *Pieve di Teco* Bn. demanded many hours, so that towards noon of the 9th the regiment only could be put in march. To the falling of the night the *Mondovì* Bn., in vanguard, reached Maqellara, on the right of the Drin, but the other battalions still found themselves near Topojani. The *Dronero* instead, with single 15 mules, had proceeded slowly - because of the cargo carried by men, the device of safety and the conformation of the land - but sure towards the objective. At 17:00 approximately, reached little more than three kilometers from the bridge, it had been received from active rifle fire and coming from automatic arms from the covering relief the access from the west to the bridge, but after a short action the adversary withdrew and the small crown of heights occupied. Here the battalion was stopped by Gen. Battisti, who in the meantime had reached Peshkopije, in order to watch and to strike the passage

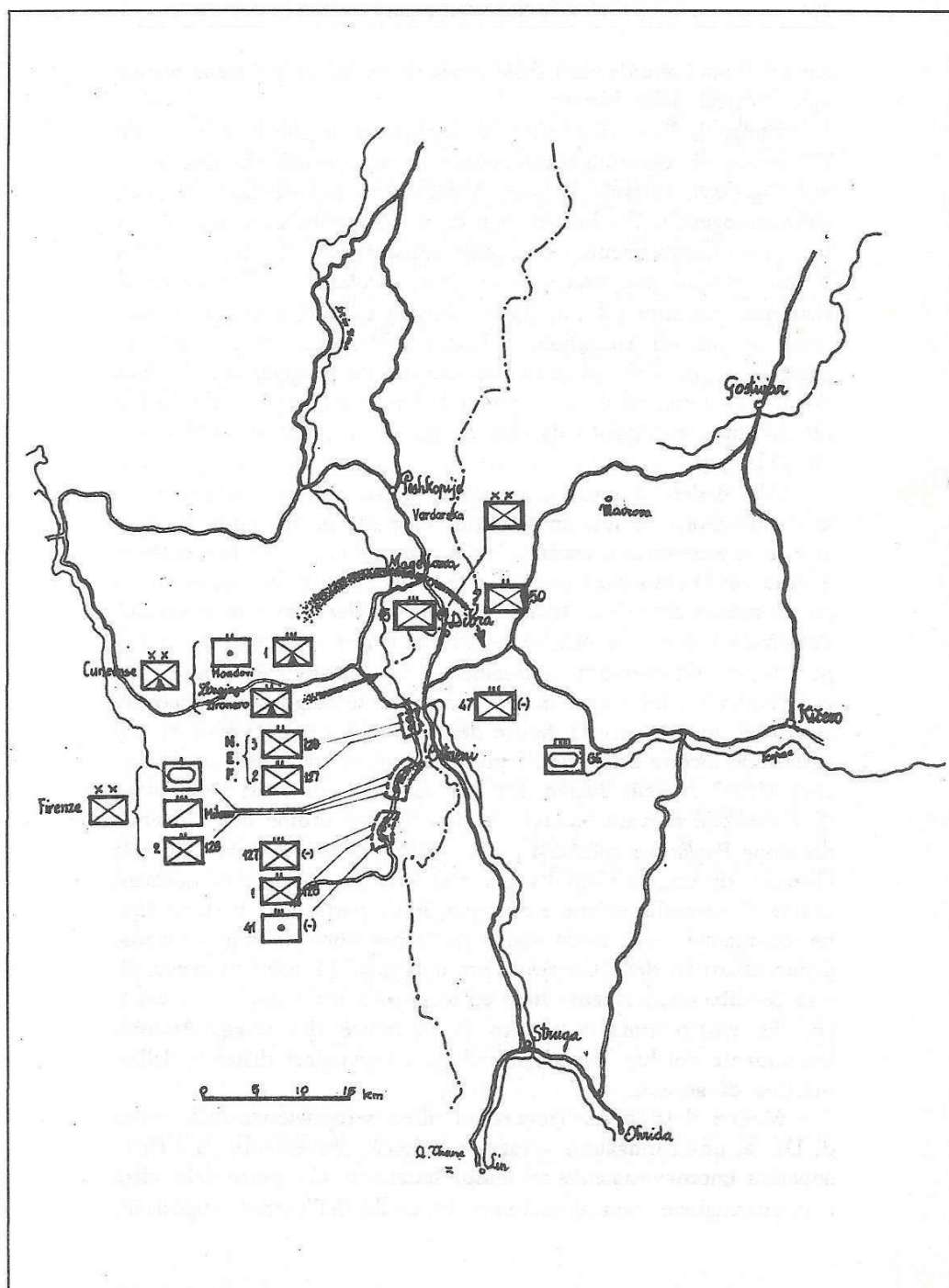
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 703

The advance on Dibra (9-12 April)

Schizzo n. 109

L'AVANZATA SU DIBRA (9-12 APRILE)



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

on the river, watching itself from the origins from south, since news lacked of the *Firenze*.

Along the border line, to the north-west of Dibra, the covering forces of the III sector maintained the contact with advancing Yugoslavian elements, however the lack of their consistency) aggravated from the heterogeneity of the units, did not give much confidence of it of being able to act offensively neither of being able to resist to strong attacks, such that Gen. Battisti sure perplexity did not hide on the atmosphere of existing safety on his left flank and to the rear. The enemy had a pair of battalions in front to Maqellara, in Albanian territory; on the Drin, to which subsequently two Bn. joined of the 15th infantry, and the 47th infantry to obstruction of the Ostrenit valley. The all supported by two groups from 75, two from 105 and two from 152.

At 08:00 of the 10 April the 1^o alpine moves with two battalions in first group and one in second. Rejected the Yugoslav units, it was attested just beyond the border: laborious and slow advance but limited rendered for the found resistance, the high snow and, in special way, for the most driven in fog. Moreover, also considering the progresses of the German advance from east - of which Gen. Battisti ignored the capacity, being lacking in connection with the Comando Superiore and Gen. Nasci - a examination of the circumstances advised against to move completely without information, holding account moreover of the fact that to back remained one uncertain and confused situation: the main units of the border defense (I/74th Inf. of the *Puglie*, III CC RR. Bn.) moved in the plain of Pishkopije had left the positions on order of the Commander of the *Puglie* division in order to move itself more to the north. The following day, when the attack resumed, the visibility therefore was reduced to prevent whichever action of neutralization and support from part of the alpine batteries; however, in the late morning the position of Pasina Livada, first objective of the *Cuneense*, was occupied. The column had endured relatively light and much inferior losses to those of the enemy, but particularly felt was the death of the Maj. Annoni, commander of the *Mondovì* btg. fallen at short distance from the objective of the attack.

While the 1st alpine operated on the northern relief of the ridge of Dibra, a German, armored formation coming from Kicevo appeared without warning and unexpectedly to the doors of the city and the garrison, not to the current of the collapse of the Yugoslav army,

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

after a vain attempt of resistance surrendered ⁽³⁷⁾. The event did not escape to the commander of the *Dronero*, since from his observatory of left river Drin he could see, during short bright spell of the haze an early riser, some blows of artillery to fall on the city and to hear they crack of automatic arms that followed. But he thought that - it was be a matter of the occupation of Dibra to work of the other battalions of the division. Nothing instead was to become known to the units of the alpine that continued to strike themselves in means to a much driven in the fog. It was only towards noon that, pushed a squadron of the *Aosta* on the road for Dibra, beyond border, came taken contact with two Germanic tanks. When, after the mopping-up of the zone, the *Mondovì* entered Dibra, at its head the alpine wanted the stretcher with the remains of Maj. Annoni.

More to south the things went worse. Gen. Negri, receipts the orders for the action that had to carry the southern column on the heights that close the ridge of Dibra to east, had to disposition *Firenze*, the regiment Lancers of *Milano* and one company of formation of light tanks. Otherwise this last one, moved to Librazhd, could not be introduced to the zone of departure for the established hour (07:00 of 9 April), in as much as the tanks were make along the extremely muddy road, and *Milano* was not joined by the horses, than previously they had been collected to the base of Alloj, for the traffic jam conditions in which in the night the came to find itself only poor cart track existing. That induced the commander of *Firenze* to modify their own devise, making oneself to precede from a infantry reconnaissance group rather than from the cavalry regiment. The assignment was entrusted to the commander of the 128th infantry with two battalions and a group of artillery. The rest of the division followed at a distance, in relation to its possibility to become part more or less quickly in the device of movement⁽³⁸⁾ exceeding

37) The German formation, before reaching Dibra, had met a long column of Italian prisoners started towards Vavrova. The first be a matter of pertaining to an baggage train unit fallen in an ambush the day before and, in greater part, of men of the vanguard of *Firenze*, attacked of surprise in the valley of Ostrenit. The Italian prisoners, as soon as seen the first German tank, disarmed the escort and, reversed parts, returned to Dibra, concurring to capture the garrison (beyond 100 officers, among which was Gen. Krstic, commander of the *Vardarska* division, and approximately 1,500 men of troop).

38) Among others, the I/128th had been struck in the afternoon of the 8th in the zone of Strebilova, on the border, for the recession of a salient. The strong enemy resistance, manifested sin from the beginning, did not concur with the action that character of surprise attack that the combat was previewed and, in which the commander of the Bn. fell bravely, had to be interrupted with the first shadows of the evening, before that the objectives were completely reached, because of the order to move on Dibra.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

large material difficulties of route. The advance proceeded quick and almost undisturbed until halfway approximately to Ostrenit, when the head of the vanguard came made sign, to a nourished from fire coming of automatic arms from the line of heights right valley. The commander of the regiment, detention in the convincement to have to that to only make with a few delaying elements - whereas was be a matter of a pair of the battalions of Yugoslav 47th infantry, reinforced from units of *granicari* - thought about being able to insist in the effort to the valley bottom, but the opposing fire little after extended also to the relief of forehead and left, and very soon he created the separation between the III/128th and the II/127th. The first one was found in a serious crisis that heavy affected its companies, the second withdrew and only it succeeded in refining an obstruction that *Milano*, arriving on the scene in the meantime, had quickly organized to the head of the valley. The gravity of the situation was not perceived fully by the division Commander that too much late, when that is the Yugoslavian initiative had rendered the bottom valley positions indefensible. The combats of the successive days, 10 and 11 April, with one, the most driven in fog that rendered the artillery idle and with a snow (beyond 30 cm) that the movement remarkably hindered, could not receive the impulse that would have been necessary and, sure, the hard experience of the 9th constituted not indifferent psychological impediment. The morning of the 11th, the 127th infantry was carried on the right ridge in order to resume the advance energetically, but nearly endured projectiles of mortar mortally hit the commander of the regiment, Col. Mazza, provoking a new time of arrest, so that the contact with the *Dronero* Bn. was only taken in the late afternoon.

Gen. Nasci, who had followed the column of the *Firenze* and was therefore eyewitness of the events, concluded his relation:

"(...) but believe I must point out to the following factors that harmfully influenced on the result of the operation:

a) *abrupt pass from the defensive alignment to the offensive alignment.*

The time awarded for the formation of the columns destined to occupy Dibra has been of a few hours (...). Their meeting demanded the entire night, so that to morning the good part of them it was tired out by the fatigue. It was moreover lacked the possibility to reconnaissance the land. And that explains in part the uncertainties begins found then in the action of some commanders. To my opinion the time granted for the preparation of the action on Dibra was insufficient.

b) *The connection direct lacked between my tactical Command and the commander the Cuneense division.*

As it is known, I have not ever been able to communicate for telephone with the division commander, neither with Colonel Balocco, commander of the column of left, neither with the Major Guaraldi, commander of the right column (battalion

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

Dronero, in charge of the connection between *Cuneense* and *Firenze*). All the times that I have had to transmit an order to the aforesaid commanders I have had to make it through the Commander of the Armed Forces Albania. I could not have been worth of the radio, because, for a misunderstanding of technical character, imputable - to how much he seems - to the staff of the engineers of the *Cuneense* division, the index and the frequency assigned to the two stations of the net, division Command - Dibra column Command, was also employed also from other stations in the inside of the *Cuneense* division. It disturbs and the interferences that followed some rendered every effort practically vain in order to obtain the connection between the two Commanders. Lacking any connection between my employee and me, the possibility has come me less also than to coordinate the efforts of the operating columns and to eventually impress new impulse to their action (...)" .

In the area of the Struga column of Gen. Ferone, strengthened from the Biscaccianti cc.nn grouping., had entered the Yugoslavian territory on the 9th hitting against fire direction centers tenaciously held of to the relief of the long grip the lake. After a day of combat, the morning of the 11th the last of the numerous anti-tank obstructions was exceeded and an unit of the 4th bersaglieres was launch on the objective. Cavallero was pressed from Mussolini that, given news of the advance of a German army corps from Bitolj on Florina, ordered to send Italian units from the zone of Struga in direction of the south, for the roads towards Bilishti, in order to concur to the Germanic advance and, implicitly, to avoid that the Germans entered in Korça before us. The Comandante Superiore knew that by now the conclusion was near, but he was dealt to hurry it. Reached Q. Thane towards 08:00 in order to follow the events and informed from Gen. Ferone that for the troops now was simply dealt to go ahead, to await the news of the occupation of Struga, therefore it was pushed towards the city, entering at 13:30. Soon after small German formation arrived from Ohrida. And subsequently, from Tirana, Farinacci, Starace, Jacomoni, etc.

Seen the situation, Cavallero ordered to forward at once on Ohrida coy. the motorcyclists of the 4th bersaglieres and while one light column, constituted from the 13th infantry of the *Pinerolo* and smaller elements - already in preparation climbing over the *Arezzo* and was carried at once to Struga, where would have been stopped for the night; then the following day would have continued on Bilishti, skirting from the west the lake of Prespa. Of course, to part sporadic the residual resistances of armed nuclei, Gen. De Stefanis, commander of the small column, communicated the existence of an unexpected obstacle: the impassability of the routes between the lake because submerged for a feature, much already to have been

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

rejected from one German armored division. Consequently asks to pass for Rezan-Bitolj-Florina, but in order to do this it was necessary for German authorization the zone, being comprised in the operating area of the German 12th Army. Cavallero then decided that for the moment the column was to arrest at Rezan, making headed against the Greek front between the two lakes.

The combats on the eastern front against Yugoslavia was finished and remained to supply for the mopping-up of all the territory comprised in the Librazhd-Dibra-Ohrida triangle. To such goal, and having to concentrate all the attention on the 9th Army, was proceeded to a reordering of the Commands and the units. Gen. Nasi returned to his XXVI Corps; the XIV Corps, the grouping taken to the own dependencies the *Firenze* also "Biscaccianti" cc.nn. and the "Brisotto" group. The *Cuneense* passed to disposition of the Comando Superiore in order to reorder itself in the zone Librazhd and the *Arezzo* returned to the III army corps.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Chapter XIII

THE BATTLE OF EPIRUS

1. POLITICAL - MILITARY SITUATION IN APRIL 1941.

On 28 March Eden returned to Athens and he was met at once by Koryzis and the Gen. Papagos. These seemed to give as discounted the imminent entrance into field of the Yugoslavia to side of Greece and Great Britain, much to propose the constitution of an only allied front from the Adriatic to the Aegean Sea in a position to opposing a secure resistance to the twofold German and Bulgarian offensive. But at the same time to this defensive, consider possible attitude and necessary to proceed to the prompt "*mopping-up*" of the Italian forces in Albania, so as to recover very soon the divisions engaged in such operation and with they to reinforce the Macedonian front. The creation of an allied alignment depended essentially on the choice of the assembly zone of the bulk of the Yugoslavian army and by its initial deployment. For before the opportunity of realize appeared obvious in a region not immediately attainable from the concentric offensive of the countries adherent to the Tripartite Pact, therefore convene to collect the forces to south of the fluvial arc the Drin-Sava-Danube (the line held from the Serbs in the 1st World War), that is in the eastern Montenegro and in the Serbia. As far as the alignment, no doubt on the defensive possibilities offered from the water course and the mountainous region of the center-southern Serbia. It would have concurred, indeed, to realize a sturdy obstruction against the origins from Bulgaria and a strong support of rear to the operating Greek army in eastern Macedonian.

Adopting this solution, the forces located in Slovenia and Croatia would have had to oppose a wearing down and delaying action to the invasion from the north and Hungary until to the Serbian redoubt. Sure

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

it would have been painful to renounce to great part of the national territory, but to this price it was only lawful to hope to face in favorable conditions the threat from the Bulgaria, most dangerous because tending to separate Yugoslavia from the Greeks. The appraisal was certainly valid under the military profile, but in war political factors exist and psychological that cannot be neglected, even if of little important or quite denied from the technical point of view. To part the consideration that to resolve the other people's problems is always easy, as could Papagos, who tenaciously had been struck in order not to abandon eastern Macedonian, also evidently condemned to falling to the first attack, thinking that the government and the Yugoslavian supreme command could have renounced more than half of the country? But in his optimism the Greek Supreme Commander went beyond: he newly wished to line up to the Macedonian frontier all the Greek and British forces available, "*supposed that we - commented Eden - there would be you feel yourself obligated to defend Saloniquco if the Yugoslavia were to intervene*"⁽¹⁾, and to ask Turkey to assume the burden of the defense of western Thrace. For the truth, also Churchill was optimistic, as he appears from the directives that he made at once to reach Eden.

Eden and Generals Dill and Wilson were instead more cautious. The Foreign minister, pointed out to his Greek interlocutors who first of all were from seeing what the government of Belgrade meant to do, then could themselves consult with Turkey, which but, given the previous ones, did not seem just that it was incline to strike itself for Saloniquco. Dill and Wilson, finally, held to specify unanimously not to have some intention to move ahead in the English forces before exactly knowing Yugoslavian decisions and operations plans. The issue for the moment remained in suspended to await of the result of the contacts with Gen. Simovic. But these, than moved with the lead feet, were communicated to Campbell that the Yugoslav government would not have denounce the pact by the Regent – anything more he would have limited himself not to ratify it or to ignore it - and was underwrite not oriented to make official declarations that they could still compromise more the situation already on the verge of collapse. But he concurred to receive Gen. Dill. The head of British Imperial G.S.G. had therefore the yearned for talk with Simovic, the present Minister of War and the interim head of G.S. Gen. Ilic. He explained that the English troops were deployed on the line of the lower Aliakmon, where were being arranged to defense, however they were

1) A. EDEN, op. cit., pag. 309.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

ready to carry itself ahead, to support of the Greek units located to defense of Salonicco, in case the Yugoslavia had been engaged to enter in the conflict in the case of a German attack on Greece. Gen. Dill concluded asking to invite to Belgrade also Eden and proposing an official notice in which it became known that Great Britain was decided to take part to favor of the Yugoslavia, if it where assaulted from Germany, and that, if the Germans had turned the aggression against the only Greece, the Yugoslavia would be taken part, of concert with Great Britain, to favor of Greece. There and then, perhaps because taken the unprovoked, the Yugoslavian exponents concurred with this declaration, but the following day, they rethought to us and renounced to sign a document that however established a precise engagement for their government. In order to end, Simovic specified that, for fear of repercussions on the international situation, it was intended not to take any initiative that could be considered provocation in the comparisons of the Germany, therefore did not think opportune to receive the Foreign Minister of English and, the talks of military character had to be simply considered as Exchange of points of view and not like formal agreement on operations plans to you. In spite of these reticence, Gen. Dill returned to Athens "*discreetly satisfied*".

The 3rd, or better the night on the 4th, at the station of Kenali (Kremenica) the military heads met: Papagos, Dill and Wilson one side and Gen. Jankovic from the other. The results were disappointing. The plan introduced from the Yugoslav G.S. relative to the hypothesis of a German offensive on Salonicco and beyond the Struma was based on decidedly wrong information approximately force and deployment of the Greek and English units, such that was left falling; in addition, it came denied every news on Yugoslavian planning, except the existence of four divisions to the Bulgarian frontier and as many to that Albanian, let alone little consoling the clarification that of front to a irruption of armored forces the Yugoslavan divisions were impotent. But a more concrete agreement on the common operations against the Italians was caught up: the Yugoslav forces would have delivered an offensive before still of the 12 April, given previewed for the completion of the assembled, with two divisions from Podgorica on Scutari- Tirana, from Prizren on Kukes - Tirana and from Dibra on Kruja- Tirana, in at the same time to the efforts that the Greeks would have renewed in the directions Elbasan- Tirana and Berat - Tirana. Gen. Papagos was pleased, at least for the Albanian theater, because the Yugoslav divisions had effectives than more double than those Italians.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

First of April the alignment of the Greek army, than in the March month it had numerous varying, and of the British expeditionary Corp, it turns out from the sketch n. 110.

The Section of armed with the Epirus (Gen. Pitsikas) was constituted by I Corps (two divisions), by II Corps (four divisions) and from a reserve (three divisions). The Section of Army with western Macedonian (Gen. Tsolakoglou) was composed of the III and IV Corps (each with three divisions) and from the division of cavalry in reserve. The Section of Army with eastern Macedonian (Gen. Bakopoulos) had of four divisions and the brigade of the Nesto. The grouping W (Gen. Wilson) was composed from the Section of Army with the central Macedonian (Gen. Kotoulas) with two divisions and from the British expeditionary Corp (two divisions and one armored brigade).

After all, against the Italian Armies 15 divisions were found; against the Germans, four divisions and one brigade to shelter the border and as many to the rear.

The defensive position was supported, on the left, to the mass of Kaimaktsalan (2523 m) on the border, came down to the threshold of Edessa, the west of the city, followed the ridge of Vermion (from 1200 to the 2000 meters of altitude), it still came down on the threshold of Verria and caught up the Aegean with hills of right river of the Aliakmon (or Vistritsa): a semicircle of a hundred of kilometers online by air (sketch n. 111). The allied forces were intermingled according to the criterion to assign in kind close to the mountain Greek troops, well trained for that land, and to those British, motorized, the level zones. Therefore, from left to right, they succeeded the 20th Inf. Div. and the Greek 12th Inf. Div. and the New Zealand 2nd Inf. Div.; in the front they were the Greek 19th and the English 1st armored brigade; to the rear, in assembled course of, the Australian 6th Inf. Div.. On the left, the somewhat to the rear, a mixed formation to the level was arranged one of brigade, in charge protect the northern flank against origins from Bitolj, being Gen. Wilson much skeptic on the possibility, for Yugoslavia, to prevent a Germanic irruption from that part. When, first of April, Gen. Freyberg saw the units Greek yields at once account that truly Greece was fighting a single enemy: the Italians. To the east divisions in such conditions existed to provoke more than a doubt on their ability to hold. The 19th Mot. Div., just constituted in Tessaglia with three regiments, an exploring unit and a regiment of artillery, turned out on a present force of some thousand of combatants; the 12th Inf. Div. was with six btg. rather than with eight, previewed how much

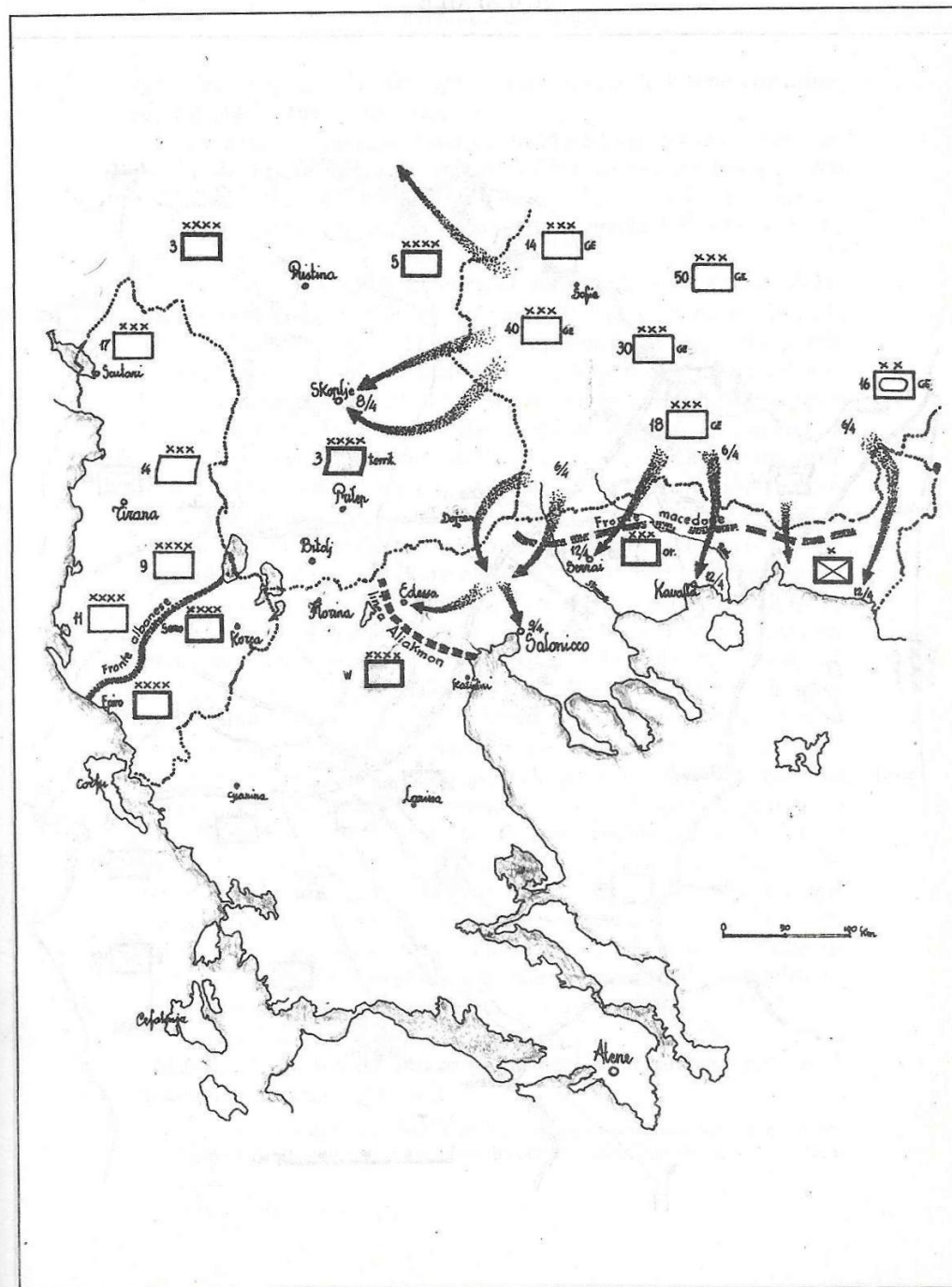
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 713

The enemy alignments in Balcania on 6 April

Schizzo n. 110

GLI OPPOSTI SCHIERAMENTI IN BALCANIA IL 6 APRILE



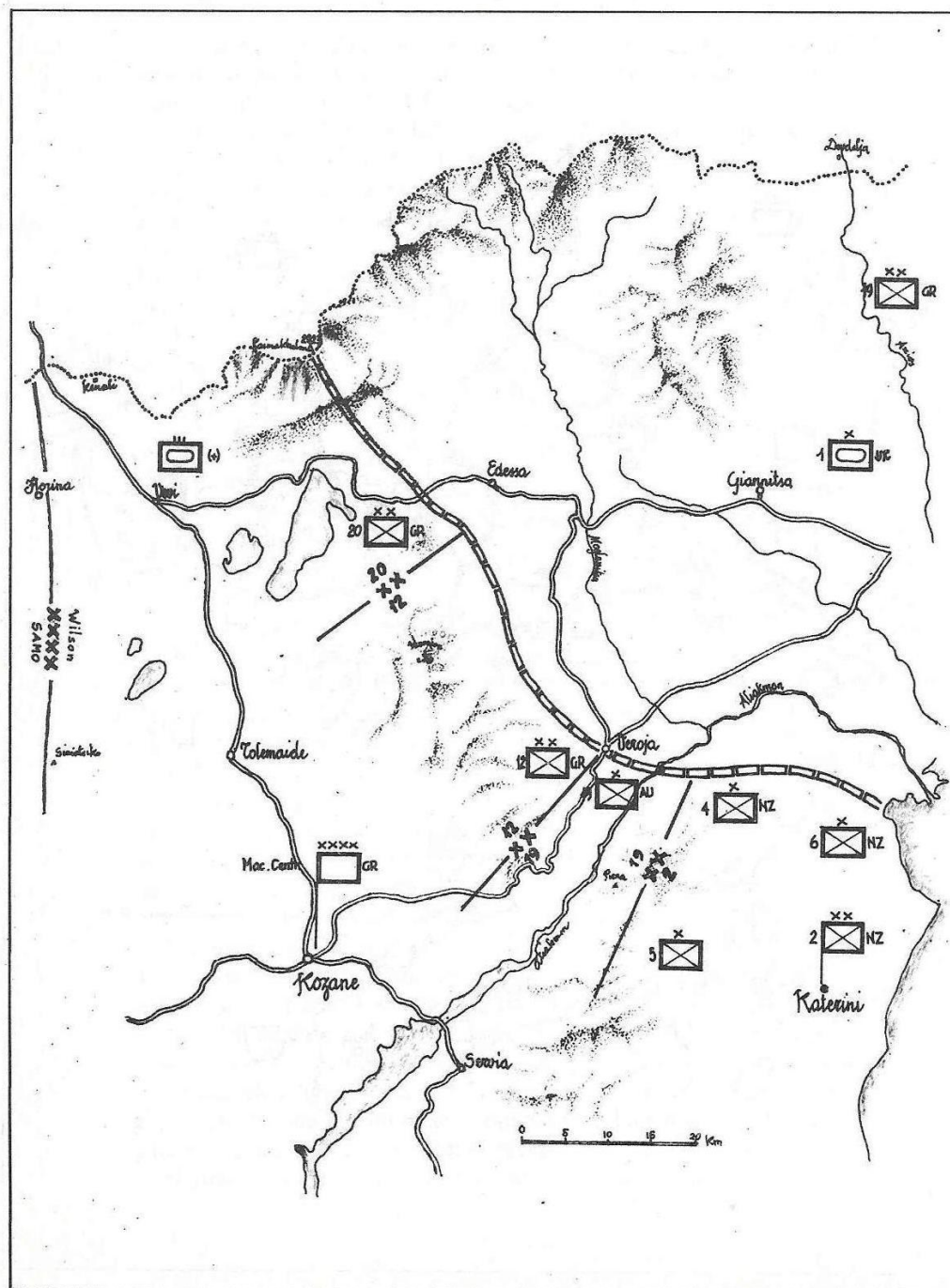
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 714

The Anglo-Greek alignment on the P.D. of the Aliakmon

Schizzo n. 111

LO SCHIERAMENTO ANGLO-GRECO SULLA P.D. DELL'ALIAKMON IL 6 APRILE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

from the organic; the 20th, constituted unit also among the last ones, were still in phase of completion.

On 6 April the Germans entered eastern Macedonian and Thrace. In eastern Macedonian they attacked with the XVII Corps (Gen. Boehme) with the 2nd Panzerdivision, 5th and 6th the Mt Div. and 72nd Inf. Div. Before it entered Yugoslavia, occupying easy Strumica and one was about to turn itself towards, the south.

At the dawn of 8 April the vanguards swept up the troops of cover and the exploring group of the 19th Mot. Div., sent in all rapidity to the border. On the impulse they continued towards the south, provoking the hurried withdrawn of the frontier detachments on the right of the Vardar and the flow of the 19th division towards the hilly watershed chain between the Vardar and the Struma: the way of Salonico was opened. Gen. Bakopoulos, commander of the Greek army, had received order "*to resist until the last one and to yield the arms only when it had come to lack every possibility defense*"⁽²⁾, but, seen the impossibility to contrast with success the Germanic push on Salonico and considered not to more be able to count any more on the 19th mot. Div. nor, less still, his three divisions of infantry, all already engaged frontally, on 9 April asked the cessation of the hostilities for all the forces to east of the Vardar. The armistice was signed at 13:00 in occupied Salonico.

Since the beginning and also "from the" vague and conflicting news visa vie the combat in Yugoslavia, the war vicissitudes had left to catch a glimpse the eventuality of the fast separation of the Yugoslav force from those Anglo-Greeks and, much worse, the opening than a north front in order to adorn the consequent threat from Bitolj. Since from the moment of outlining itself of such event to its to put into effect itself would be last very little time, the Greek Supreme Command, of agreement with Gen. Wilson, decided to modify the alignment at once, renouncing to the support to the Kaimaktsalan. It was not issue simply of a defensive flank: a penetration towards Florina would have taken to the rear both the army of Gen. Tsolakoglou and the W grouping. The movements were completed within the night of 9 April (sketch n. 112).

According to Gen. Papagos the news supplied by the Yugoslav military attaché in Athens and from the British intelligence was absolutely different from the truth:

"(...) While the German advance in Serbia had proceeded since the first day quickly) and nearly without to meet resistance from part of the Yugoslav forces,

2) A. PAPAGOS, op. cit., pag. 167.

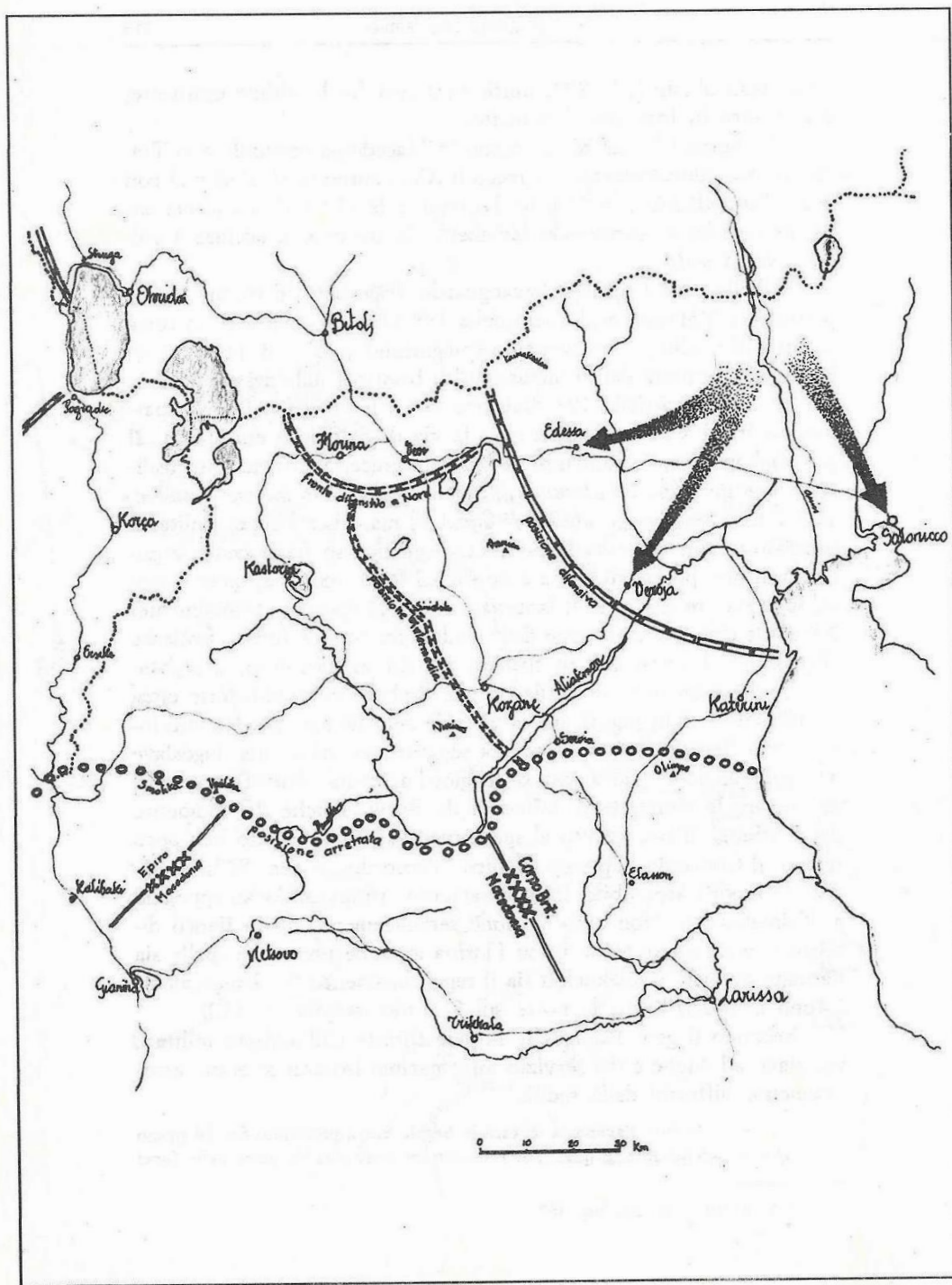
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 716

German offensive in Macedonia and the Greek defensive line

Schizzo n. 112

L'OFFENSIVA TEDESCA IN MACEDONIA E LE LINEE DIFENSIVE GRECHE



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

still the evening of the 8 April the cited sources of information communicated to the Greek supreme command who the situation in southern Serbia had assumed a favorable course, than the army Yugoslav had obtained a large victory in the zone of Skoplje and that the German troops, decimated in the effectiveness and means, withdrew in disorder towards the east" ⁽³⁾.

Which that it was the shape with which such news came supplied, it is sure that in those days the spirit of the Greek supreme command oscillated in a see-saw of hopes and disappointments. The fall of Bitolj opened the eyes and yields definitively necessary a re-examination of the situation. By now it was necessary to try to face with the best of their ability the invasion of the entire one 12th Army with Mar. List. According to Gen. Papagos was possible to harden the resistance on a more rear alignment, from the Ionian sea to the Aegean, on which the entire Greek army could deploy: Butrinto-positions of border from Mt. Tumba - Perati bridge. Mt. Vasilitsa - Venetikos river until to the confluence with the Aliakmon- Aliakmon river until to the height of Servia - Mount Olympus. Here the army of the Epirus would have held the field to the West of the Pindo, that one of central Macedonian the feature from the Pindo to described re-entering from the Aliakmon river and the British expeditionary Corp would have held the right until the Aegean. The troops of western Macedonian would have reinforced the army of central Macedonian, constituting the backbone. The plan was not a innovation, in how much since first of March, when the Germanic troops had entered in Bulgaria and had been assumed the contemporary of a German offensive in depth to east and one massive Italian counter-offensive to the west, had been studied the evacuation of Albania in favor of a more economic defense. Now it seemed reached the moment to realize it, stated the extreme difficulty to uncouple unit from the Albanian front. Therefore order (was given 9 April) to lighten the superfluous field of Korça from the materials and supplies. The withdraw of the troops was delayed, to await further operational clarifications, much more than an other painful decision it seemed necessary. For how much it had been constituted a quickly northern front, it appeared evidently delicate for being able to resist to a collision that was known delivered with resolute attempts; the opportunity derived some to prepare itself for worse: the breach of the front in correspondence of Veve. In such hypothesis the twofold risk showed oneself then to lose the forces located at Vermion (20th and 12th Inf. Div.) and not to succeed to guarantee the withdrawn of the Tsolakoglou army. Gen.

3) A. PAPAGOS, op. cit., pag. 180.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Papagos determined therefore to transfer at once the two divisions on a middle position, of connection between the north front and the rear position, and the 2nd New Zealand Inf. Div. on the northern slopes of Mount Olympus in order to close the pssses of Portas and Petras. The regression would have happened with priority for the Greek units, to protect the north by the British mixed formation and to east by the New Zealand division, therefore it would be withdrawn this last one, finally would have come unhooked the tactical complex of Veve.

At dawn of 10 April the German XL army corps, collected in the zone of Bitolj - from where a column had detached towards Ohrida - was attacked towards the south. In the late morning the first patrols entered in Florina and made contact with the line of resistance of Veve, hastily reinforced with an Australian regiment. The combat began and it developed itself nearly at once negatively for the defenders, the whose task was to resist in place in order at least two days and possibly three. But for two days the German initiative was reduced to limited actions, since the *Leibstandart and Adolf Hitler*, that it was characterizing the British positions and the mined fields sent that the protection, did not mean to move completely without information. The true attack was delivered the third day, on 12 April. After six hours of combat, the Australians, than did not succeed to save themselves in order to realize a tidy withdraw, giving up of the action and only fifty men could escape.

Also in Albania the combats turned out hopeless. And the offensive ordered on 5 April against Elbasan, Berat and Valona were been shipwrecked and were clearly that the Italian 9th Army was in its turn in order to attack. The morning of the 12th, therefore, Gen. Papagos telephoned to the two commanders of Albania, Generals Pitsikas and Tsolakoglou, to begin the withdraw. For the first one was be a matter simply of pulling away of the right (II Corps), but for the second it was the abandonment of the Korçno in order to take connection with the troops of the Section of the Army central Macedonian (20th division), on the northern slopes of Mt. Siniatsiko. To conclusion of the telephone call, Papagos informed that unfortunately it was not excluded a second and more wide regression. In the late afternoon Gen. Wilson arranged that the forces of the obstruction of Veve abandoned the zone, under the protection of the 1st Arm. brigade in charge to give run to a delaying action. The provision was judged "*hurried*", and not justified from the course of the defense of Veve, from Gen. Papagos, and for more realized without to inform of timely the Greek units on the left.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

On 13 April the Greek Supreme command taken the deliberation to concentrate every unit on the rear P D.. For the army of the Epirus it came left to the judgment of its commander the possibility to modify the course of the line of resistance from Butrinto to Konitsa leaning itself instead to the Kalamas, if thought preferable to the logistic ends and, probably, also remembering the brought back defensive success against, troops of Gen. Visconti Prasca. The sector limit between the two Armies with Albania ran from Q. Qarrit to the Gram - Eptachorion-Mt. Vasilitsa, where the *Julia* had concluded its adventure on the Pindo. The army of the western Macedonian, put into effect the first phase of the withdraw and taken to the own dependencies 12th and 20th divisions, Or better their remainder, would have continued the withdraw on the rear P;D.. Optimistically, both the armies had to try to recover "*some major unit not closely necessary to the maneuver*" in order to allow with the Supreme command to deliver up a general reserve.

The 14 April the defense of Klisura had been swept up, the positions of Mount Olympus just invested, the Aliakmòn reached to south of Kozane. Tentative Greek reaction to Klisura, where the Bilishti – Kastoria - Greven roadway was threatened, they remained in the intentions for the impossibility to find units in a position to resuming the hold. It was a lot if a pair of companies of the 13th Inf. Div., coming from Albania, could constitute an little obstruction beyond the lake of Kastoria and units of the 20th Inf. Div. succeeded to prevent infiltrations through the chain of the Siniatsiko. While the Germans reached the valley of the high Aliakmon, the Section of the Army with the western Macedonian was sped up to withdraw in order to avoid to see itself to cut the way of withdraw. But decidedly the things had been put too much badly. The middle position Mt. Vernon - Mt. Siniatsiko - Mt. Vourinos practically was jumped; being the adversary reached to attest itself at Aliakmon also to southwest of Kozane, after to have overcome without many difficulty the intermittent opposition and weak exercised from the Greek troops. The 15th the pressure of the invader continued violent. To east the progression to the stratus of Mount Olympus was slow but insistent. Where the events assumed dramatic inks were in the Greek field. To south of the lake of Kastoria the division of cavalry and the 13th Inf. Div., for how much reinforced from other units, were struck then for short time, without more ability than resistance, lacking in the only route of withdrawn towards Grevena, they were ran trying shelter confusedly on the Pindo, while the German they got hold of the crossroads of Argos Orestiakos and entered Kastoria.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Collapsed the shelter that had to assure the tidy flow of the remained forces of the army of the western Macedonian, it became distressing also the recovery of these units. They did not try not to open a passage with a hopeless attack: simply they were thrown towards the chain of the Pindo, subdividing in rivulets long the smaller mountain practicability. As if all this he were not sufficient, because of the continuous aerial bombing on the street and crossroads the centers of transmissions interrupted the connections between Supreme command and both Army Commanders. On 15 April every organized Greek resistance came to stop to east of the Pindo.

It remained the British expeditionary Corps. The morning of the 16th Gen. Wilson had a talk with Gen. Papagos. The situation did not leave alternatives: the game was lost and a lot was worth re-embarking the British troops. On the tactical plan, to still remain on the line of the Aliakmon meant the annihilation, was necessary therefore to maneuver in withdrawn carrying itself of blow to the Termopili.

- The 18th and 19th had had place two meetings to the Royal palace of Tatoi. In the first the King and Gen. Papagos participated for the Greek part and Ambassador Palaiet, Gen. Wilson, Gen. d'Albiac and Adm. Turle for the English side. At the second one they purposely joined Wavell, come from the Cairo, and Gen. Mazarakis, new head of government ⁽⁴⁾. Papagos traced a dark panorama: the British forces could not have maintained themselves long on the Termopili because much too inferior regarding the adversary, especially in the aerial field; the Greek forces of the Macedonian did not exist more; those of the Epirus chased by the Italians, were in flood withdrawn, defenseless against the aerial bombing, in serious crisis for the throttling of the bridge of Perati, in extreme difficulty on the logistic plan because the supplies could only flow from the ports of Preveza and Missolongi, connect with Gianina by a single roadway. The soldiers were physically and morally exhausted. The Commander of the army of the Epirus had shown insistently the convenience of the cessation of the hostilities. Government and Supreme command, agree, had up to now refused; now, but, he did not remain that to make to more continue the resistance long possible and however until when it was necessary in order protect the inevitable and undelayable British re-embarkation. For three days still the rearguards of Gen. Wilson remained at the Termopili, then, in the night on the 25th, was come unhooked. That night was begun the evacuation via

4) On 18 April, in front of the ruin, the Prime minister Koryzis was killed

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

sea. On 1 May the expeditionary Corps had left Greece abandoning 104 tanks, 400 guns, 1,800 mtr. and 8,000 motor vehicles. With 53,000 men it had endured approximately 12,000 losses.

2. THE OPERATIONS IN THE AREA OF THE 9th ARMY.

The directives n. 23 of Comando Superiore⁽⁵⁾ at the same time established that to the precautionary measures understandings to make freely to the determined requirements on the borders northern and orient them, the 9th Army continued to take care of the logistic preparation for the offensive design realized between Cavallero and Gen. Pirzio Biroli and the 11th Army was limited to the engagement to guarantee the possession of the ridge of Tepeleni. On this base the 9th Army Command made the point the situation. For how much the political upheaval in Yugoslavia stretched to modify the military panorama, also however the Yugoslav neutrality, than at least initially was still possible to hope, on one side and the presence of the German 2nd armed in Bulgaria from the other, seemed to concur the breakthrough of the position of Greek resistance of the Koracno with smaller difficulties of those previewed in recent passed (plan *Chiesto*). The necessity to accelerate the tempo was however certain, that it carried as consequence to the renunciation of the action of the valley of the Devoli and, above all, of the Voskopoj, where the deficiency of roadways and the deficiency of baggage train, presently not leveled would have slowed down the advance in remarkable way, having itself to constitute successive logistic bases. However, such renunciation did not involve, in depth, serious damages in how much the lack of Greek reserves rendered probable that the breach of an sensitive feature of the front could provoke the downfall of the entire system. It turned out, therefore, confirmed the convenience to operate without hesitations for the left wing, establishing as objective the conquest of the crossroads of Bilishti.

But the order did not come circulated. In the late afternoon of 1 April Cavallero convened Pirzio Biroli and it put it to the current of his decisions: to north he would have act the XVII Corps, in the zone of Pishkopije the XIV and from the Dibrano to the lake of Ohrida *Firenze* and the *Arezzo* framed in the new Nasci army corps. The task of the 9th Army became closely defensive now.

5) DSCSFAA, f. 04336/op. dated 28.4.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The night on the 3rd the enemy attacked with extreme violence all the field of the *Venezia*, from Mt. Kalaze to Mt. Breshenikut, but without any result. The first attempt was demolished from the obstruction fire, a second to effort it reached until the line of barbwire where it was stopped clearly and with sensitive losses from the arrest fire. It was considered a isolated attempt, instead be a matter itself of a diversion. At 07:00 of 4 April the Greek 9th Inf. Div. movements against left of the *Tridentina* and *Taro*, in the feature Guri i Topit-Kollak, aiming at the breach of the forehead of the army; if it had reached the ridge of Llenge sketch would have been in conditions at least for going around the alignment of the *Forlì* (n. 113). After repeated assaults and counter-assaults, the adversary succeeded to seize of the summit of the Guri i Topit, for repulsed and finally retake it definitively. Also a position of a sure relief fell in the field of Kollak, but it had succeeded of short breath since the day following the II/20th Inf. of *Taro* knew to resume the quota, re-establish the situation. Between the two directions of penetration, the 225th Inf. *Arezzo* is struck hardly preventing the threatened inflection of the line. Mussolini was interested of the episode of Guri i T opit, but Cavallero, considering just the general and local picture, could diminish: "*the loss of the height is what that regrets, but is not serious. The alpine have struck much good. Evidently this enemy attack is one answer to our surprise attack of ten days ago*".

On 5 April, in relation to the agreements of Kenali with the Yugoslavian representatives, Gen. Papagos gave to the order to both the Sections of the Army with eastern Albania to attack to very soon. The offensive of Gen. Tsolakoglou, that it had received also the cavalry division, covered a sure character of independence; at least initially. Its objective was Elbasan, to always reach following the guide lines: the valleys of the Skumbini and the Devoli. An ambitious program therefore with the forces to disposition is from asking itself as was compatible, but - as it happened for the Italian designs - the allied competition, thought decisive because directed was calculated to the flank and the rear of the enemy. The action on Librazhd - Elbasan would have remarkably facilitated, in the phase of breach, from the contemporary efforts of Yugoslavia from Struga and Dibra: the first one getting hold of Q. Thane would have blocked the *Venezia* in the grip strip along the lake of Ohrida, continuing and conquering Kukes would have cut the entire Italian III Corps to the rear. In short to the Greek III Corps would have been enough to engage in depth the correspondent body

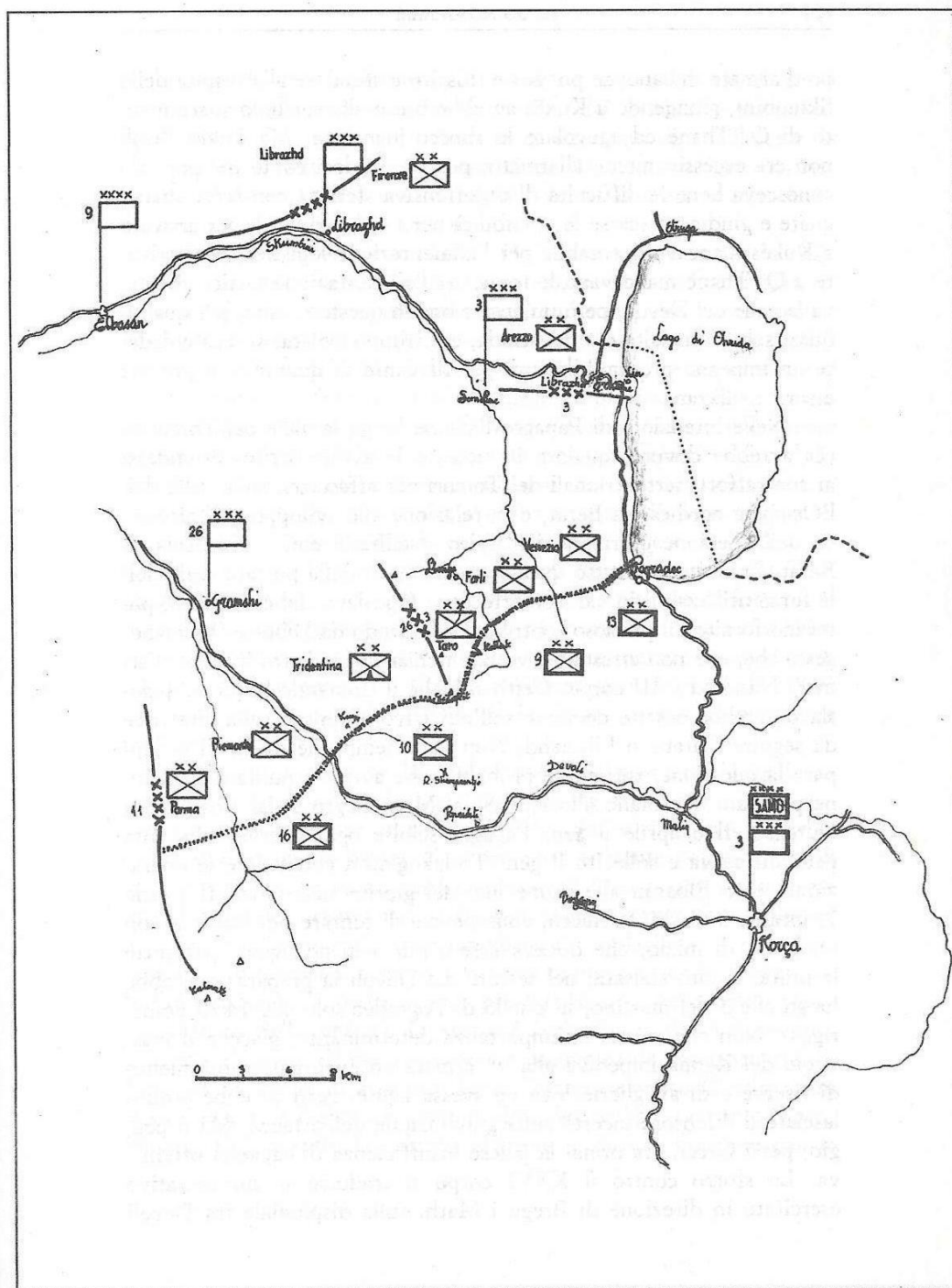
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 723

The situation in the sector of the Korçano on 3 April

Schizzo n. 113

LA SITUAZIONE NEL KORÇANO IL 3 APRILE



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of Italian army; if then it were successful to smash in to the front of the Skumbini, reaching Kukes it would have taken to the shoulders the obstruction of Q. Thane and facilitated the Yugoslav outlet. But Pirzio Biroli excessive was not alarmed; also becoming account of the danger it knew the difficulties of an offensive delivered with inadequate forces well and judged insufficient the possibilities for the Greeks from south: in order to arrive to Kukes the roadway for the logistic feeding lacked, in order to arrive to Q. Thane lacked the forces for the tactical feeding. It remained the valley of the Devoli, but an operation in this field, for favorite how much nearly endured from a road, was too much isolated, yes to demand a engagement presumably more important than how much it could not be realized.

In the intentions of Papagos the action along the valley of the Tomorreces would have due, in case the success had smiled on to them, to extend to the northern buttresses of the Tomori in order to show valley of the Osum, to the northeast of Berat, and in relation to the development of the offensive of the Section of the Army with the Epirus, to facilitate it with the threat on Berat. Frankly all this appears outside of the real capacity of the usable forces in Tomorreces valley. Yugoslavia, for its part, could supply a precious contribution coming down from Dibra on Librazhd, gesture that, where not arrested, would have recalled behind the Nasci army corps and the III Corps. Sure he is himself that the Yugoslav Supreme command would have had to decide on the objective, and therefore on the director to follow: Tirana or Librazhd. Way did not have time neither to develop the issue, however it is probable that it would have headed at Tirana for giving one hand to the effort from the Montenegro and the Kossovo on Durazzo. On 6 April Gen. Papagos dissolved every reserve on the date for the offensive and sped up Gen. Tsolakoglou to begin the operations towards Elbasan to the first lights of the successive day. On the 7th, in fact, the SAMO attacked, aware to try for the last time. The hour of beginning, that it had to be more or less equal for all the units, turned out deflected: in the area of the Devoli the preparation had place to the morning of the 3rd, in that one of Pogradec only at 14:00 of the afternoon. That it did not have a determining importance, since the mass of the Kamia prevented to the 9th Army an eventual movement with reservoirs or of artilleries, where had had some, but could have left the uncertain defender on the gravitation of the attack. But worse, for the Greeks, it was by now the evident insufficiency of offensive ability. The effort against the XXVI Corps translate in an attempt exercised in direction of Bregu i Math, on the watershed between Devoli

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

and Tomorreces. It was the area of the *Piemonte*, that it left to approach the first advance group short distance from the barbed wire and then triggered a violent an arrest fire much to demolish every desire and to make to even renounce to overtake. The III Corps of Gen. Arisio, instead, after a calm morning, came invested towards 14:00 from a half hour of preparation.

The first action came turned from Q. Vashes against the right of the *Venezia*: though entire dominated the resisted well, only losing the more advanced height, than then it retook with a nocturnal counterattack. Soon after it began another action, distinguished, in the zone of Kollak against the area of the 207th infantry, but also it without to obtain the minimum success. According to Gen. Papagos "*was not obtained results of greater note because the Yugoslav division that it would have had to operate in direction of Elbasan did not moved*"⁽⁶⁾. On the tactical plan the speech is extremely disputable, in any case in the night the Yugoslav Commander - he made to know that it would have attacked the following day. The morning of the 8th the SAMO resumed the initiative. This time the effort, at first turned against Mt. Bepirit, to the extreme right of the *Taro*, in short extended on a front of attack of approximately eight kilometers online of air: all the area of the *Taro* and still the right of the *Venezia*, but, for how much repeatedly supported and from a nourished fire of artillery, did not reach scratch the resistance position. The XXVI Corps, then, neither was it engaged. For the Greeks it was not more anything to do.

Perhaps to this Cavallero point it had a uncertainty. That the situation was in unstable equilibrium and that from one day to the other the German advance could provoke some decisive event in Serbia or in Macedonian was evident. Therefore as the opportunity to pick the occasion was obvious without to lose time. However, for wanting to be ready everywhere, given guidelines and orders did not obey to a simplicity criterion as he would have been preferable - given the assumed defensive attitude and the forces employed in the device – such that reappeared our more frightening enemy: the hurried, poor substitute of the rapidity. Same the 8 April Pirzio Biroli was invited to keep itself in a position to moving with a warning of two or three days; Nasci had order to immediately attack towards Gostivar with the *Cuneense* and *Firenze*; analogous order, for Struga, received Gen. Ferone. The 9th, while the column "Dibra" began to march with

6) To PAPAGOS, op. cit., pag. 176.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

his two divisions, assembled to hard work in the night, came circulated directives n. 26:

"As soon as it is delineated the enemy decline in the Dibrano is not necessary to move ready our action on the front of Pogradec in order to determine the breach of the Greek front and to retake the Korciano.

It is necessary therefore to predispose the concentration on the director of Pogradec of the divisions *Cuneense* and *Firenze* that, in adding to the *Pinerolo* Inf. Div., constitute a devolved mass to action (...) ⁽⁷⁾.

Evidently, if the Nasci army corps came beyond started towards Dibra and, not sure easy it would have been to *concentrate* the two divisions on the director of Pogradec, especially being held present poor the conditions of the Dibra - Librazhd road. However the Command of the 9th Army considered the hypothesis that, for effect of the Germanic successes, the army of Tsolakoglou meant to withdraw so as to be connected with the troops sent into Macedonian to obstruction of the roadway for Larissa. In such case the units deployed between the lake of Ohrida and the Tomori would have had to withdraw themselves along the Bilishti-Florina axis, with the prejudicial to defend to everywhere by means of sturdy rearguards the feature Pogradec - Mt. Kosica. The necessity came down some, for the attack, to arrange of a strong breach in order to avoid a checkmate, whose repercussions would have been for sure harmful under all the aspects. Now, from four days the troops of the III Corps were subjected to enemy actions that, if also rejected with success, had worn away the lean battalions and downplay the offensive ability to the divisions *Taro* and *Venezia*, uninterruptedly online from November 1940. Since therefore they could not be considered sure usable as breach spearheads, the assignment had of necessity to be entrusted to other divisions. Moreover it was necessary to proceed with immediacy to the alignment of the medium-caliber gun artileries, since the issue demanded a sure time because of the difficulties of the land to the head of the Skumbini. After all, the proposals formulated from the 9th Army in order to join to the directives n. 26 were to operate with two army corps sent on relatively narrow fields, yes to realize an effective repetition of efforts. In other words: In Corps with the divisions *Venezia*, *Forlì* and *Pinerolo* along the Pogradec - Bilishti, director leaving from the field of the *Venezia*; and the Nasci army corps with the divisions *Taro*, *Firenze* and *Cuneense* to right, along the director

7) DSCSFAA, f. 05021/op. dated 9.4.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Trebinje- Korça, leaving from the field of the *Forlì* and with the competition begins them of the *Tridentina*.

Obviously similar design remained theoretical end that the begun Dibra operation was not concluded, but it was offered endured an alternative: to smash in with a determined action the threshold of Struga and, from Ohrida, to continue towards south for western Rezan-coast of the lake of Prespa-Q. Zvezdë-Bilishti, so as to cut the way of withdrawn to the adversary. For this task column with part was constituted one of the *Pinerolo*, under the command of Gen. De Stefanis. In the meantime, on all the front, but in especially on that one of the III Corps, it came maintained an intense activity exploring with recognition patrols and from combat in order to test the enemy, which he reacted always with nourished fire of automatic arms and small-caliber batteries. On 11 April the column of the *Pinerolo* leaped over the *Arezzo* that hardly had entered in Struga, and continued towards Ohrida (sketch n. 114). Gen. Pirzio Biroli urged Gen. De Stefanis:

"The German troops collections in the zone of Florina move, in the day today, for the axis of Bilishti, towards Korca. And necessary to use the threat that it achieves from this action in order to recently sweep up the defensive detachment put in action by the enemy to hold of Sirci Han (lake of Prespa).

To such aim to assess through an audacious exploration the deployment and consistency of the obstruction so as to mount the directed device timely to sweep up such resistances. Unblocked the roadway for Gorica, advance on Korça and you take immediate connection with the German troops, everywhere they are found.

On the front of the III Corp will develop a how much before concurrent action (...)⁽⁸⁾.

But the route along the western side of the lake of Prespa was impassable and Cavallero did not think opportune to ask Mar. List the passage within the zone of operating responsibility of the 2nd Army - than sure it would have been refused -, and that one along the eastern side of the lake of Ohrida turned out interdicted from a Greek defensive flank constituted from one remarkable defended street interruption from a ant-tank ditch and multiple obstructions the Comando Superiore, in the meantime, had thought convenient to clear organic the operations plan to put in action to the first sign of Greek withdraw. To that the directives were turned n. 28⁽⁹⁾. Held

8) DS Commando 9th army, f. 4428/op. dated 12.4.1941.

9) DSCSFAA, f. 05344/op. dated 12.4.1941.

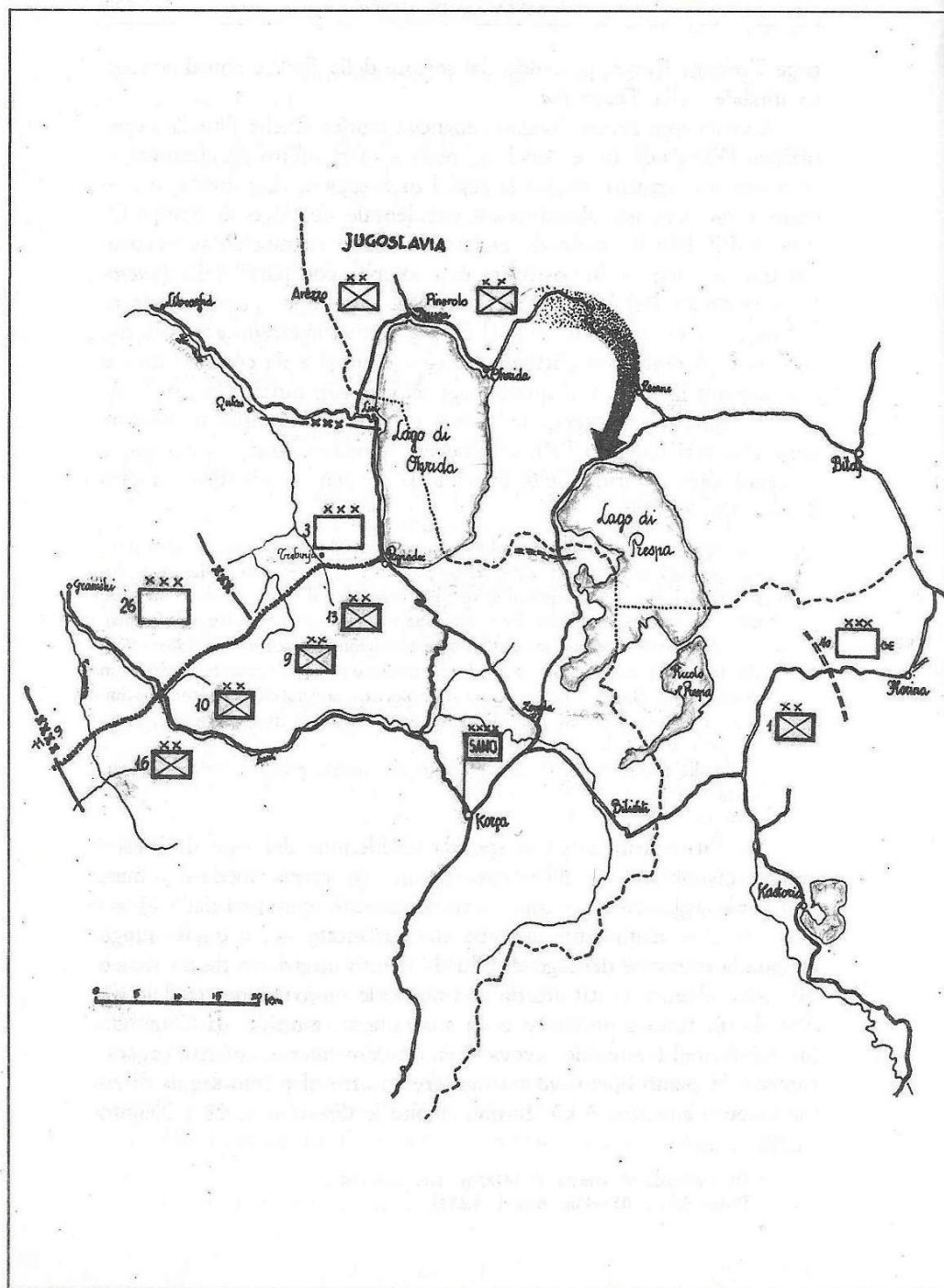
The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 728

The situation in the sector of Korçano on 11 April

Schizzo n. 114

LA SITUAZIONE NEL SETTORE DEL KORÇANO L'11 APRILE



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

account of the direction - in which already a part of the Germanic mass operated (Florina - Bilishti) and of course of the front puts into effect them and of the communications, it had, in succession of times, to catch up the as quickly possible crossroads of Bilishti and to head then in direction of Erseke - crossroad of Kalibaki, localities where reassume all the communications that give Albania adduce respective in Macedonian and Epirus; to continue therefore from the crossroad of Kalibaki on Gianina and Missolungi. That place was necessary to share the forces and to organize the Commands in relationship to the expectable requirements, is of the penetration in depth is of the garrison of the Albanian frontiers. Consequently:

- the 9th Army it had to carry out the maneuver going around with two army corps, the III and the XXVI, leaving to control the Albanian frontiers the XIV and IV Corps (to assume to own dependencies);
- the 11th Army it had to supply to the advance to the frontier with the VIII, XXV and special army corps and proceeding then to the occupation of the Epirus and the Acarnania with the XXV Corps;
- the XVII Corps would remain to disposition of the Comando Superiore for other requirements.

All that, of course, always that a collapse did not take part; in this last case the imperative one was to break off everywhere and to advance cutting every withdrawn direction of to the enemy. Gen. Pirzio Biroli, in reality, already had been oriented to take advantage of the moment, inevitable, of the withdraw of the Greek forces and when the information supplied from the prisoners captured from the numerous patrols or in the course of local actions, let alone from deserters, made to think a lightening in action of the Greek positions, above all before the XXVI Corps, he established to attack the 14 with only the forces which he had: *"Since the enemy does not have the possibility to proceed to reactions counter-offensives - he specified - must itself be dared lightening the front in the not active features"*.

Just that day (12 April) the Greek Supreme command ordered by telephone to the troops of Albania for giving beginning to the withdraw, thin out progressively the front. Profiting for the weather conditions - rainy weather with fogs, at times very driven - the non-divisional and services units they did not begin to flow down, followed, in the afternoon, from the first elements of the four divisions online. The movement was perceived, although the Greeks tried to mask it with artillery shooting on single features, but the 9th Army wanted to await the night in order to let out the patrols and to have sure confirmation. He received, at dawn of the 13th all major unit, than during the nocturnal arc had adopted the device studied for the case of the enemy withdraw,

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

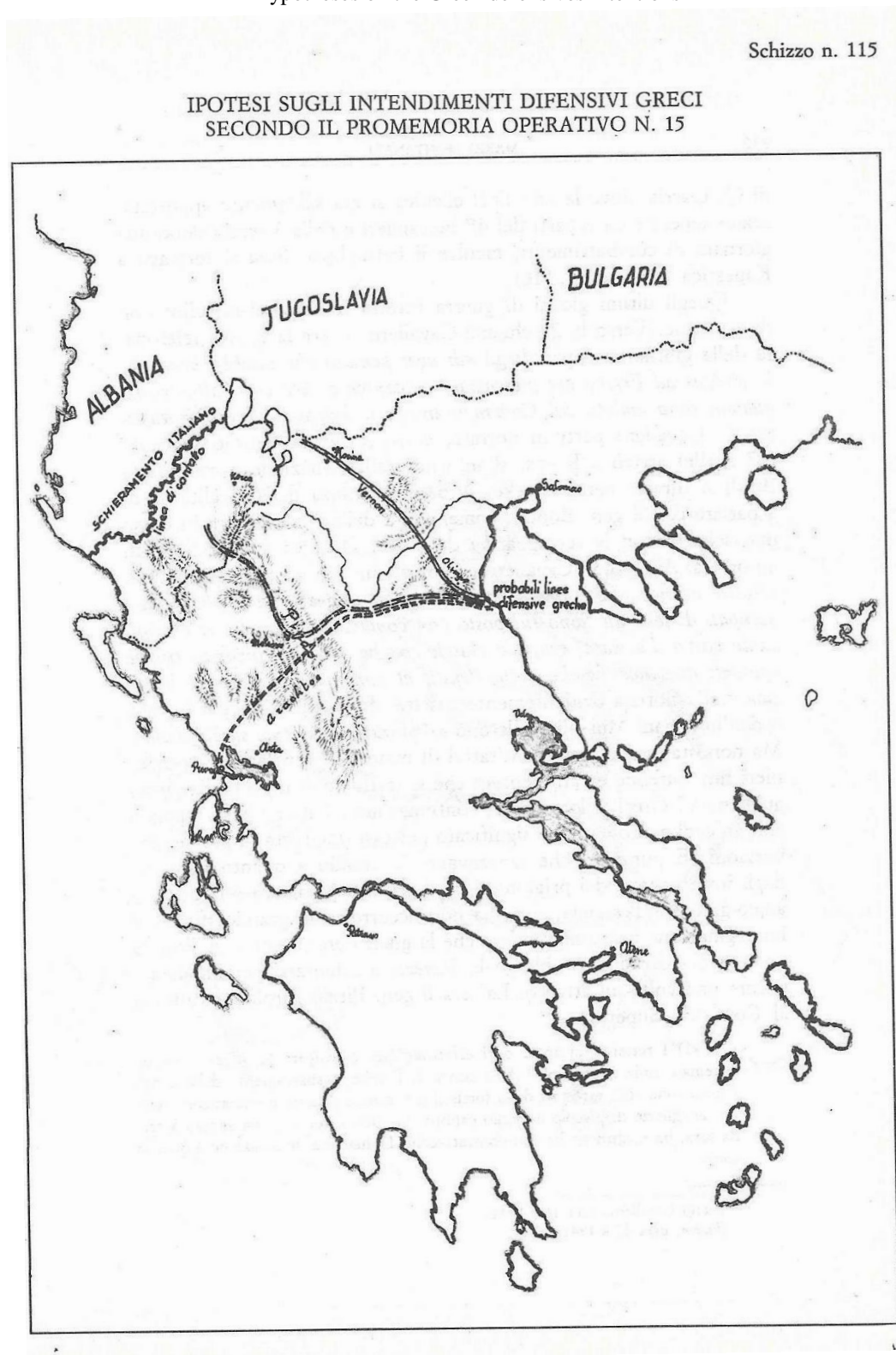
they moved at the same time, on the entire forehead of the army, for how much in some fields the advance was outlined somewhat endured slow for the time necessary to repair the immense and deep interruptions on the few roadways. To evening the III Corps - to which, route the resistance of the Greek defensive flank between lakes, the De Stefanis column was combined - resumed the contact with the Greek columns. In the meantime Gen. Pirzio Biroli had given new dispositions, complementary of the previous ones and on the base of the directives n. 28 of the Comando Superiore.

The advance progressed in spite of the oppositions of the Greek rearguards. At 12:30 of the 14th, forced the Devoli, Korca was occupied from units of the *Venezia* and soon after the 4th bersaglieres headed on Q. Qarrit, while the "Ricagno" grouping found a strong obstacle between the swamps of the Maliq and the Mali i Thate in a obstruction meant protect of the Greek withdrawn on Bilishti. Mussolini insisted; Cavallero urged. According to every logic the residual possibilities of the enemy were opinion in the defense to the last or time determined from the line Florina- Mt. Vernon- Mt. Mount Olympus, obviously until results held the front of Korca to the threshold of Bilishti, or of the alignment Erseke – Pindo – Aliakmon river - Mount Olympus, or finally of Preveza - Pindo- Aliakmon river- Mount Olympus (sketch n. 115). From active the resistance that the 11th Army found, only whose left (IV Corps) was in motion exceeding strong reactions, was clear the intention of Papagos to delay until the extreme limit the withdraw in that field. Therefore to reach soon the Perati bridge and the crossroad of Kalibaki meant to trun from the northeast the troops of Gen. Pitsikas. Was first of all necessary to open the pass at Q. Qarrit itself; the entity of that garrison was ignored, but considered the importance of the position it was easy to imagine that it was consisting. In fact not only the 16th Inf. Div. had been in charge of the defense of Q. Qarrit, but also the had joined to it the 1st Inf. Div., constituting the "group of Borova divisions" (locality to south of Erseke). It was therefore on purpose that Pirzio Biroli ordered the XXVI Corps to start the *Cuneense*, as soon as it was arrived from the Dibrano, for Tomorreces valley directly on the ridge of Erseke. But the division was not in a position to engaging itself being all scattered, so that Cavallero took part arranging that the *Pusteria* - facilitated from the *Parma*, that it had to show oneself in the Osum valley - addressed on Erseke following the director – Çerevode – Frasheri - Ersek. The night on the 15th the Greek positions on the lake of Maliq and Mali and Thate, were swept up and Bilishti reached on impulse; the 16th also the defense

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 731

Hypotheses on the Greek defensives intentions



The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of Q. Qarrit, where the Greek 16th Inf. Div. steady had lain in wait for, was exceeded by units of the 4th bersaglieres and the *Venezia* after a day of combats, while the *Intra* battalion stopped at Kapestica (sketch n. 116).

Those last days of war were frantic. Mussolini did not give rest. Towards 22:00 Cavallero - it was the forth telephone call of the day – to say "*having called thought that it would be well that I went to Erseke in order to attend to the action and I say that the other time, when troops to Struga have gone with the Commander, the attack is successful*"⁽¹⁰⁾. Cavallero departed in the night, towards the 10:00 of following day (17 April) arrived at Korça, it was inquired of the situation and with Pirzio Biroli then headed towards Erseke. A short distance from the locality stopped to speak with Gen. Bonini, commander of the *Venezia*; was in course a action with the rearguard of 16th Inf. Div., but it was issue of a scant hour. At 16:30 Cavallero compiled a phonogram for Rome: "*Our vanguards formed of units of the Venezia division & 4th bersaglieres occupied Erseke stop I'm on the place with the army commander, & commander army corps, general Naschi, that has taken on operating director command troops Erseke-bridge Perati, & commander division Venice*"⁽¹¹⁾. The news evidently provoked other enthusiasms because at 08:00 of the next day Missolini telephoned hardly "*Advance on Kalibaki*". But although large amounts of materials captured and the made prisoners it would be wrong to think that it was be a matter of a simple pursuit. The Greeks, to they honor, continued to strike themselves well knowing that a yielding would have meant for they a route of large proportions. And also true that they ignored - being to how much he turned out from the interrogating of the prisoners - the collapse Yugoslavia and the Anglo-Greek unraveling in Tessaglia, however it was not necessary a great effort of imagination in order to comprise that the war was lost. At Borova a new obstruction obligated the *Venezia* to deploy in order to set up an attack once again. The evening Gen. Pirzio Biroli communicated the Comando Superiore:

"1) The repeated enemy attacks today carried out in order to sweep up the defense arranged on the heights to south of the ridge of Erseke, to obstruction of the same ridge, has been arrests the strongest reaction of automatic crews, mortars, artilleries of small and medium-caliber gun. The defense, most tenacious anchor to late evening, has reacted also with counterattacks. Tomorrow morning, in relation to how much over:

10) Diary Cavallero, date 16.4.1941.

11) Ibid, date 17.4.1941.

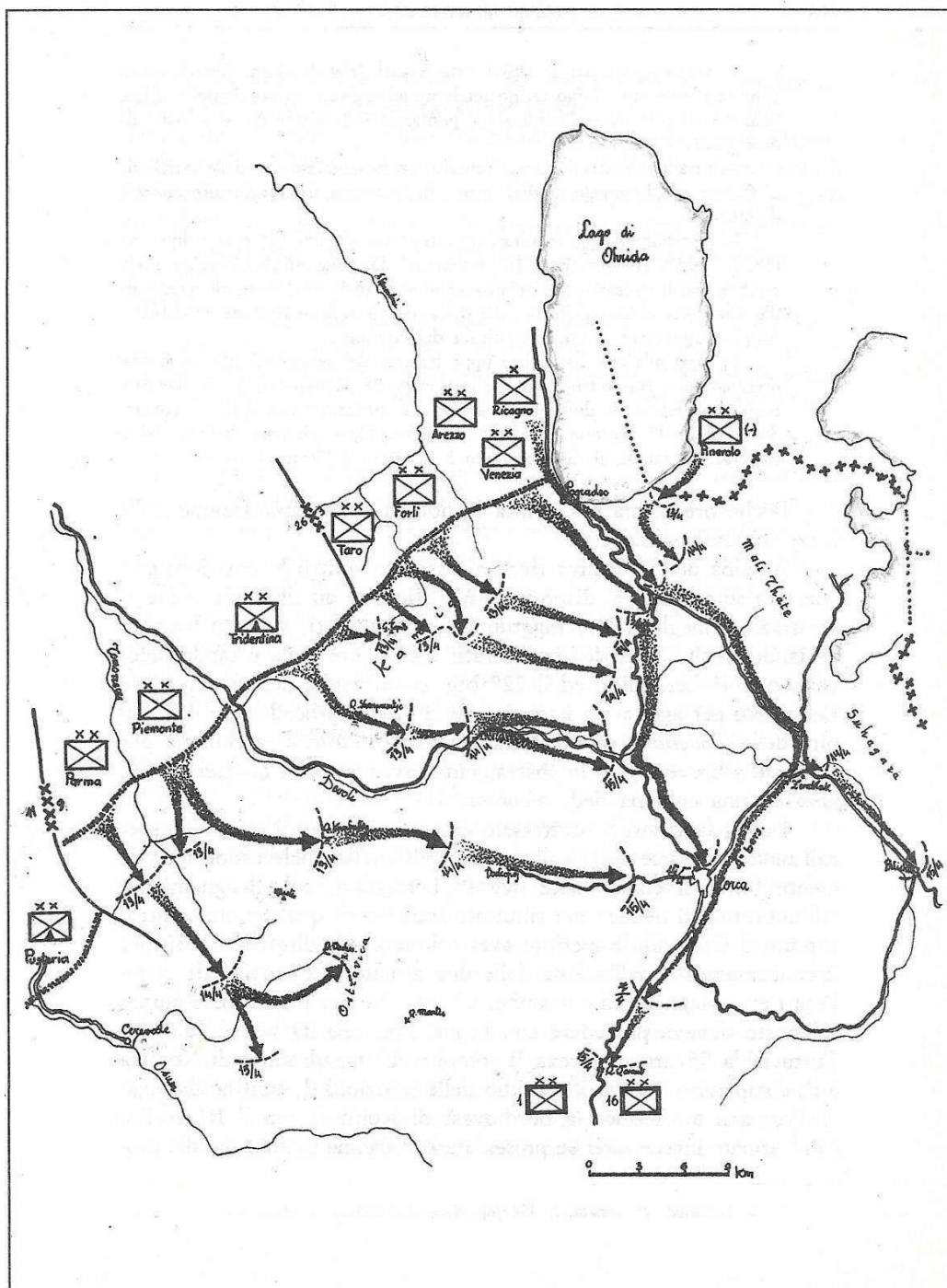
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 733

The operations of the 9th Army from 13 to 15 April

Schizzo n. 116

LE OPERAZIONI DELLA 9^a ARMATA DAL 13 AL 15 APRILE



The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

- it will be executed by the 5th alpine and units of the *Pusteria* division already in zone a maneuver to wide turning to go around the enemy defense from the West and to resolve the situation heading at the dominate heights from the north Perati bridge;

- the frontal attack with the alignment of the C.A. artilleries and with the employment of other units of infantry and of the regiment will be reinforced *Lancieri di Milano*:

2) The prisoners captured today belong to the 9th, 13th and 16th division (1st, 20th, 33rd, 72nd infantry and 16th artillery). From he agrees declarations would turn out that the enemy withdraw happens under protection of rearguards of the forces of a regiment that climb over on pre-established rear lines, until catching up the fortified line of the border.

3) Today at 10:30 hours Italian troops of the field of Bilishti have made contact with the German troops at boundary stone 28 (Kapestitsa): Gen. De Stefanis, commander the *Pinerolo* division, has been met with Lt. Col. the commander of the 171st infantry of the 73rd division. After the military honors and the friendly salute, the detachment has returned to Florina (...) ⁽¹²⁾.

A few hours before arrived news of the capitulation of the Yugoslav Armed Forces.

At dawn of the 19th was resumed the effort against the Greek positions. A single signal to the device is sufficient to illustrate as the divisions, or better their groupings are advance, were intermingling on the director for Perati: astride of the passable roadway the 4th bersaglieres and the 72nd cc.nn.; Bn. on the right, direct on Leskoviku in order go around to wide beam the defense, proceed the 5th alpine of the *Tridentina* and a battalion of the *Pusteria*; on the left, in order to exceed to short beam the obstruction, they advanced the *Lancieri di Milano* ilan and a column of the *Venezia*.

The upset combats continued for all the day, in special way from part of the center column, in which it fell mortally hurt the commander of the 4th bersaglieres, Col. Scognamiglio. At dark the enemy was repulsed back some kilometer. While the Comando Superiore had circulated the directives n. 30 for the coordination of the action of both armies.

The objective of Perati bridge was assigned to both. The unit that in order before was reached on the place had to proceed with the maximum speed towards Kalibaki. However the 9th Army had the task to get hold of Konitsa and to gradually complete the garrison of the positions of border from the lake of Prespa to Mt. Vashes (to the north-west of Konitsa) with the III body; the 11th Army instead would be continued with Gianina taking to the own

12) DS Command 9th army, f. 4846fop. dated 18.4.1941

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

dependencies the XXVI Corps (*Tridentina* and *Pusteria*) destined to act, where of the case, in the region of the Pindo. For the 9th Army there was still from eliminating the tenacious resistance of Barmash, where the group of divisions of Borova had been coagulated with what it remained to it. The morning of the 21st the encircling of Barmash from the south opened the road to the *Lancieri di Milano*, than, in spite of the sporadic presence of delaying nuclei, they could be thrown to Leskoviku and chase the adversary. At dark the 9th Army communicated:

"Commander Greek division collection to a km to south of the town of Leskoviku faced *Milano* regiment & communicates that he awaits the German Commander with which he will make an armistice or capitulation stop I have ordered that enemy division surrenders to the 9th Army stop Otherwise our troops will continue the action (...)"⁽¹³⁾,

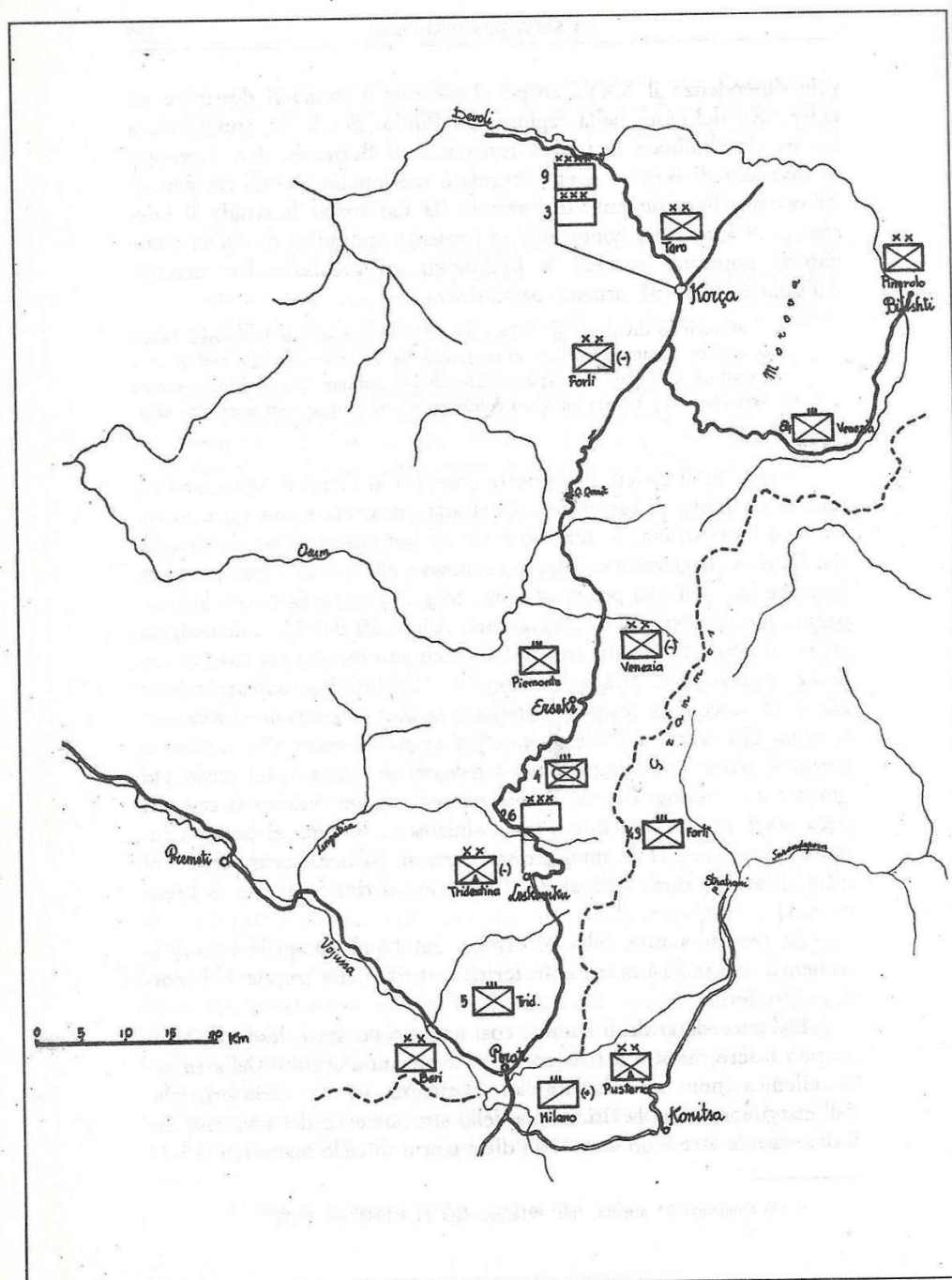
Nothing but the falling of the night concurred with the Greeks to come unhooked itself and prevented to *Milano* to chase on the road, embedded and with several obstructions, or off road, on broken and impracticable land for the cavalry. It was therefore necessary while to remove the obstacles and then to await the first lights of the dawn in order to continue, what that came made with the company motorcyclists of the 4th bersaglieres. At 06:20 of the 22nd the company arrived at the bridge of Perati, finding occupied by a German formation. "*The lancieri di Milano* - reported Col. Morigi – arriving on the scene at 07:15, still in time in order to cut in two the enemy column that is withdrawn. The orders of the commander of the army corps to advance into Greek territory are imposed, but the Germans prohibit me in the more categorical way the passage and with anger I myself see to parade before all the Greek column without being able to attack it ". On left the Pusteria it was carried while on the ridge of the Grammos and came down on Sarandaporos towards Konitsa. The action lasted until to the 23rd. That day sketch ended the war (n. 117).

The losses endured from the 9th Army from the 14th to the 22 April were the following: officers 14 died and 46 hurt; non-commissioned officers and troop 131 died and 736 hurt.

Succeeding itself of the events, therefore as they have been described, someone can be induced to think that the advance to continuation of the Greek withdrawn one has not succeeded to assume of the characteristics of the pursuit of the appearance of the exploitation of the success, but the speech to make is another. In the ten days of operational cycle (13-23

13) DS Commando 9^a army, burlaps 4916/op. dated 21.4.1941 hours 19,55

LA SITUAZIONE DELLA 9ª ARMATA IL 23 APRILE



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

April), the 9th Army it did not have evidently to support a true and own battle (sketch 118). It had been placed on the defensive, renounce explicitly to set up an action of breach, since did not exist the presupposed for such kind of tactical action. Consequently, it came deliberately left the initiative to the adversary attending that this was shown or under shape of a folding maneuver or disintegration. Taken place the first hypothesis it would have been opportune to try to precede the enemy on the obligated passages, without to stop itself in actions of force but avoiding obstacle, for blocking the way of withdrawal. A simple look to the topographical map makes to comprise the extreme difficulty, in those circumstances, to realize as far as all obvious. It did not remain that to chase and this it was put into effect in terms of space and time that could appear disproportionate to the instrument, in conditions that sure cannot be thought ideal: a distance from the 150 to the 300 kilometers on foot for the groupings quickly prepared by the various regiments ⁽¹⁴⁾; a march fraught with onerous difficulties: for the troops of the III Corps because of the most numerous street interruptions that, even if sometimes not defended, involved nevertheless long times of arrest, and for those of the XXVI Corps, that they had to exceed a deep mountain zone, because of the fords of torrents, the unevenness, the deep calanque to cross, the tortuous of the tight and muddy paths, climb on the mountain crests some nearly to knife cut; the most frequent one to change of the dependencies, in order to take advantage of every possibility, with a rendered action of difficult command, if not quite hampered from the unsatisfactory connections of the radio. But the Achilles' heel was constituted from the insufficient possibilities to take part timely in order to concur a movement express. Only in the feature from Erseke to Leskoviku (of some thirty of kilometers), the Greeks put in action ten interruptions: four destructions of bridges on torrent and six landslides of 40-50 meters of road to average coast, plus an Anti-tank obstacle prepared with a twofold order of fragments of tracks fixtures in a concrete base. The commander of the engineers of the XXVI army corps comment:

"Because the means of the engineers can be employed in movement war, it would be necessary that the units were not only equipped with motor vehicles for the transport of the materials but also for the transport of the personnel. In order to cooperate

14) Case limit is that one of a baggage train unit arrived in the rears of the XXVI Corps the 12th. The 13th recovered in way: it marched so, uninterruptedly, from Durazzo to Leskoviku.

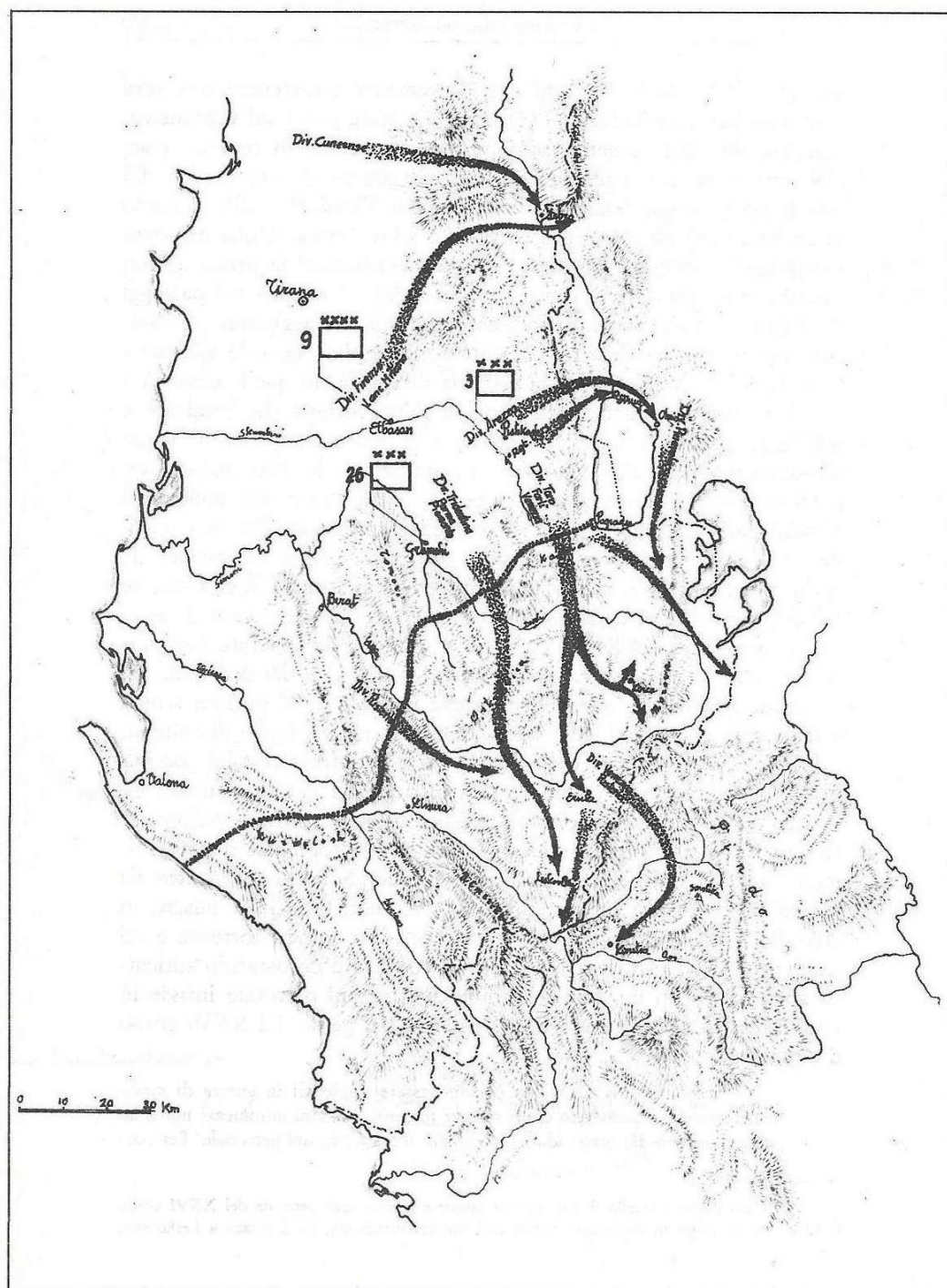
The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Page 737

The operations of the 9th Army from 7 to 23 April

Schizzo n. 118

LE OPERAZIONI DELLA 9^a ARMATA DEL 7 AL 23 APRILE



The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

then in zones the mountains and unproved of roads road opens to truck traffic the engineer units would have to be equipped also of baggage train. All the means of transport of the engineers would have to be in full efficiency at the moment of the need and would be therefore necessary, in order to obtain that, that they did not come employed for other scopes previously or, at least, were endured and continuously reinstated of the losses endured turns of the weather (...)" .

3. THE OPERATIONS IN THE AREA OF THE 11th ARMY.

In relation at the moment, and the movement elsewhere of major unit and units of the 11th army, Gen. Geloso ordered to the IV, VIII and XXV army corps to assume a defensive attitude supplying to space out in depth the respective divisions and to withdraw and see again the alignment of the artilleries.

On 1 April, without warning, something ignited to the left extreme of the army, on the south-western depositor, of the Tomori. With the news of the morning, the IV Corps communicated that the strong point of Teqe, on the line of connection with the 9th army, had been overwhelmed by the enemy, after some hours of bitter combat. The attackers, after, surprise attack had been endured organize succeeding to reject to the first attempt delivered by the *Val Pescara* Bn. by means of a snow storm in order to re-establish the situation. For how much it was not be a matter that of a controllable episode without excessive difficulties, the thing left the sign and for many aspects, denoting the approximate disagreeable of defensive organization and improvident operating mentality of the pictures. The place of Teqe, in fact, element of a hypothetical zone of safety, was completely isolated; with null to the rear, as position of resistance or systemizing of the land, the feeding concurred some or the aid, since the first elements of the defense in depth were to approximately 4 hours of march; if therefore the resistance to the end could not be supported, had been error renounced not at once and to modify tasks and consistency of the garrison dislocated thereby. Beyond to that the surprise of the small strong point, deriving from the slowing down of the safety measures was clear because of the long operating pause in that zone. Gen. Mercalli took part hardly, but Gen. Geloso wanted personally to clear the issue of the wing support. Pulling the sums, concluded deciding a urgent and complete reordering of the alignment of the *Pusteria*, based on which on the right of the Osum the area of the *Tomori* alpine came entrusted to an entire regiment (the 7th), with a series of strong points

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

departing from the southeast flank of the Tomor Varr, the top of the massive, controlling from the high saddle of Teqe. Commander of division was dispensed from responsibility of left Osum, that passed to the dependencies of the Commander of the *Cacciatori* and whose defensive organization brought back on the positions previously held, before the attack to the Spadarit again.

The Greek Supreme command, as already seen, on 5 April to the directives for the agreed offensive with Yugoslavia.

"(...) In one first phase would be aimed at the conquest of Valona of the zone of the Semeni and Devoli rivers and in the crossroads of Elbasan. The successive action for the attainment of the final scope would have been continued with forces and objected subordinated to the realization of the progresses of the Yugoslav units. In this first phase:

- a) The army of the Epirus would have operated:
 - for its part along the valley of Sushica river towards Valona;
 - for its part in direction of Klisura-Berat.

The action towards Valona would have had decidedly to be supported with powerful means and above all with artillery, for quickly being concluded. On the rest of the forehead to south of the Vojussa (Aoo) the enemy would have had vigorous to be engaged so that the beginning of the mopping-up of this zone could have place in the more favorable moment in slope of the attack towards Valona.

The action towards Berat, at first independent from the others, would have had later on to be connected with an action from the valley of Tomoritsa along the slopes of the Dardhe mountain. After the conquest of the zone of Gllava - Corogjat some units would have been pushed in direction of Fieri, in order to facilitate the action towards Valona and to create the necessary premises for the total mopping-up of the zone south of the Semeni (...)" ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Once again one dealt more efforts, contemporaries for arrival, with troops of absolutely inadequate entity. In fact the action in Sushica valley could be carried out from the 3rd Inf. Div. reinforced, but not a lot. It is not seen therefore as it could be considered "*supported with powerful means*", place that to the 12-14 Greek battalions opposed the special army corps of Gen. Messe with the *Cuneo* and *Acqui*, arranging altogether of 12 Bns. infantry and 5 of camicie nere, with a force ratio to about of 1: 1, that if could carry to a *quick conclusion* it would have been presumably to favor of the defense.

As far as the action along the Gllava - Berat director it was the task of the Greek II Corps, not considering the 4th Inf. Div. deployed on the Trebeshines, than sure it would not have left the positions. They were therefore:

15) A. PAPAGOS, op. cit., pag. 144-146.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

5th, 17th, 6th Inf. Div. in the first formation, 11th and 15th in second, the 1st Inf. Div. in reserve, for a total of 54 battalions. The defense counted on at least a share of the XXV Corps (the *Legnano*), with the VIII and IV Corps, it is worth to say on 41 battalions of infantry and camicie nere more 4 machine-gun battalions. In short, a ratio of 1:0.8, much too little in order to hope something. One joins that, occupied the zone of Gllava, it leave of the Greek forces would have had to head at Fieri in order to render the bag of Tepeleni possible. The beginning of such offensive was previewed some day after 7 April, given fixed for the attack of the Section of armed with western Macedonia. For how much they were begins the preparations, the plan had obviously not followed, not only but at the moment of withdrawn the Greek army it will not try any some combat in order to push behind Italian units to advantage of the breach of contact.

On 9 April the Comando Superiore began to catch a glimpse the possibility of a feasible operation in the field of Pogradec in concurrent with the German offensive in Macedonia. The morning of the 10th, known of the fall of Skoplje, Cavallero telephoned to Geloso putting it to the current of the events and orienting him to hold out within three days - period propose by the same Geloso - in conditions for releasing in ahead, along all the facilitation ways. Therefore a message sent in order to fix the directive:

"To precise confirmation today's communication that last events between which German occupation of Salonico with yield Greek divisions western Thrace & this morning announced occupation of Monastir they authorize to not far away preview the yielding to us of the Greek front to us contrasted stop

Is necessary therefore to be most ready to deliver famous predisposed action leaving from field XXV Corps & special army corps as well as in direction shoreline as in Argirocastro direction stop You keep in mind also Vojussa direction on Klisura stop

Concept base is to preclude withdraw at maximum amount opposing forces stop Of course to a given the moment all our front must advance stop Successive guiding our movement will be determined on basis of the situation stop

I have taken to your indication approximately warning three days note that you think opportune & also your assurance that in case to throw down events you will be ready to leave anytime stop"⁽¹⁶⁾.

That it did not prevent that, after to have spoken with Mussolini, Cavallero telephoned at 20:45 to the Chief of the G.S. of the army to say that

16) DSCSFAA, tele 05117/op. dated 10.4.1941, hours 13.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

"from tomorrow every minute is good and [the troops] will have to release without warning because three days will not have them of sure"⁽¹⁷⁾. It was therefore sent to the army corps a warning based on which the tasks came defined as it follows:

- IV Corps: to strongly proceed astride of the director of the Osum, pushing one column on the Mali in order to facilitate the action of the VIII Corps in Deshnices valley;

- VIII: to head astride of the Deshnices valley, on Klisura and the bridge of Perati;

- XXV: to break off the defense of the Kurvelesh with the divisions *Modena*, *Brennero* and *Julia* (recovered from the area of Tepeleni) and to head for Golemi-Kolonja with the double goal to cut the artery of Dhrinos valley and to facilitate, on the right, the action of the special army corps to the head of the Sushica valley. With the divisions *Legnano* and *Sforzesca* to attack towards Klisura along the Vojussa and through the Trebeshines in order to concur to the effort of the VIII Corps. Finally, the divisions *Ferrara* and *Casale* had, not hardly the situation, created from the other columns had concurred it, launch itself in the Dhrinos valley towards Kakavia - Kalibaki;

- special army corps: to push the "Pizzi" alpine group to the head of the Sushica valley towards Q. Drass, in competition with the *Brennero*, in order to open the road to the *Acqui*, and to attack with the *Cuneo* along the shoreline in order to proceed to the prompt occupation of the ports of southern Albania and to reduce therefore the burden of the refueling via land.

To the XXV Corps, which they had been assigned the greater forces, the more important task was incumbent; it had, in depth, to represent the regulator and the spirit of all the operation. Gen. Geloso, exactly for being able some better to coordinate the movements with the advance of other major unit, established own tactical Command at Sinanaj, on the roadway left Vojussa to the West of Tepeleni. He also ordered to the commanders of army corps to attack and to advance by initiative, where introduced the favorable occasion. Cavallero was still reserved to choose the moment in which give the way to the offensive in the hope of being able to put into effect with the 11th Army a maneuver that, in concomitance with the operations of the 9th army, lead to close in a bag the Greek forces of the Section of armed with the Epirus and to their capture, but the given orders to Geloso are indicated a remarkable uncertainty. The cage could only have place for effect

¹⁷⁾ Cavallero Diary, date 10.4.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of a *fast and sturdy* armed progression of the 9th; as far as the 11th, advance on all the front is not maneuver.

For some day it seemed that the Greeks meant to remain on the positions. The contacts taken from the numerous patrols still indicated a alignment in action, the local headed provoked always a lively fire reaction, the aerial recognition signaled everywhere intense working activity in order to improve the defensive systemizing and not movements of outflow from the front, the prisoners and the deserters, these last most numerous ones than before, confirmed that the adversary maintained unchanged the units in front line. But on 12 April lessening of the activity of medium-caliber artillery of Greek was noticed. The same day the Comando Superiore emanated the directives n. 28, already orally agreed for the resumption of the offensive. All the operation had on foot to be executed with troops and without the possibility, for lack of motor vehicles, to motorize the smallest unit in order to render some maneuver in tactical field feasible. On a total force of the army of 215,000 men approximately, with 30,000 draft animals, there were only 5,000 motor vehicles, hardly sufficient to guarantee the logistic services. Of the four army corps, the IV and the special C.A. were on two divisions, the VIII on three and the XXV on seven. The army reservoir, since then constituted from the *Casa*, had been assigned to the XXV Corps so that it had a fresh division for the quick advance in the Dhrinos valley. It was useful that in the first phase the army corps had how much the more possible force; in case a reservoir then had been suggested from the course of the operations, would not have been difficult to constitute it since the same advance after the breach, would have been entrusted to minor a number of divisions and remaining would be passages in second formation. In the battle aviation could have offered a contribution of enormous usefulness in order to strike the little and very determined ways of withdrawn of the adversary, but not even now its was realizable conspicuous participation because the mass of the bomber aircraft was engaged elsewhere. The participation essentially was limited to the recognition squadrons of the army and the army corps, which for more ended for having the contained activity in more short beam from the lack of the protection of fighters. It continued to dominate until last to the misery of the means that it prohibited to confer to the operations that impulse of speed - at least that one - than the situation would have demanded.

In any case, general Papagos, forced to make to withdraw the SAMO, had to take a painful but ineluctable decision: the withdraw

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of the forces of the Epirus. To Gen. Pitsikas came left a sure freedom of action; the important was that it succeeded to break off contact as quickly as possible and in the best conditions, concluding retrograde maneuver on the alignment lake of Butrinto - Stugara - border or on the line of the preferable thought Kalamas. The gen. Pitsikas had made a picture very precise of the situation - like by now if the main protagonists were all made and he had however not hesitated to write to the Supreme command proposing the search of an armistice. Seen the war lost and strongly press from the commanders of army corps, he preferred to end it with the units in Albanian territory - conquered territory - yes to demonstrate to the public opinion that only the German participation had had reason of the small Greek army. The withdraw order provoked an active resentment between the troops, and especially in the pictures, and was with malevolence that it had execution. The lightening began on 12 April with the departure of the 1st Inf. Div., already in reservoir in the zone of Premeti, towards Leskoviku-Q. Qarrit in order to reinforce the 16th Inf. Div., continuation from that one of the detachment of the 11th Inf. Div., deployed on the right of the Osum towards the Tomori. The following day came ordered the partial withdrawn one of the II Corps, whose ordered withdraw it would have concurred to maintain the contact with the 16th Inf. Div., already in course of systemizing at Q. Qarrit.

The evening of the 12th Cavallero telephoned to Geloso for having news. It was not oriented to risk, given the circumstances: "(...). *If not there is indication of yielding does not convene to move (...). You tell me that the land is bad, snow and mud, and that on the Kurvelesh there is a meter of snow; therefore it is not the case (...). And better to wait for some day. If the occasion is introduced the valley. He reminds you that when attacks, you must attack with all the army. The IV and VIII Corps must that they come ahead and that they press (...)*"⁽¹⁸⁾. And the evening after: "*We are a few steps from Kortça. Perati bridge is full of people that withdraw themselves (...). Preoccupation not to run that Pirzio Biroli thinks, to which we have given motor vehicles (...). Tomorrow you move everywhere? You have decided therefore? It goes well*"⁽¹⁹⁾. The aerial recognition marked had endured the movement that were being taken place towards the frontier, along the valleys of the Vojussa and the Dhrinos, and Gen. Geloso wanted to break off the delay. It spurred the troops: the divisions had to head ahead, to unitary block, leaving the positions

18) Cavallero diary, date 12.4.1941.

19) Ibid, date 13.4.1941.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

he puts into effect them the closely indispensable forces, stretching with action wrapping to the street nodes in order to cut the road at least to the rearguards, without worries for the eventual resistances met. The IV Corps was what more quickly it had to operate in order to facilitate the VIII. Gen. Mercalli therefore prescribed to the *Pusteria* - than since the 12th it had hurried to retake Teqe and Q. Kulmakes - to leave a battalion on the Tomori and to head towards Cerevode, and to the *Cacciatori* to go up on the chain of the Mali in order to get hold quickly of the Spadarit and of Bregu Gliulei⁽²⁰⁾. In the late afternoon of the 14th, seen the situation, Gen. Geloso circulated new dispositions to impress greater and more vigorous impulse to the offensive.

"In this particular moment - he urged - it is necessary to act with real Unscrupulousness, holding present that the enemy sure hinders our action only with strong retrograde. The void is attempted wherever it is and as soon as characterized it is taken advantage of feeding the action in the zone of minor resistance.

The enemy is completing one maneuver of withdraw with traditional criteria; it is necessary to cover it in order to transform his ordered withdraw into disorder and definitive route and total. The Commanders of division cast in ahead for giving the maximum vigor to the action of their troops "⁽²¹⁾.

The *Pusteria*, fighting without interruption, caught up the 16th the confluence of the Ambum-Osum rivers; from here, going around the left of the enemy obstruction, it headed for the high Osum for Erseke. The VIII Corps

20) The taken of the Spadarit, happened for encircling from part of the 11th alpine, had a far echo that is worth the pain to report. The event was resumed in a document L.U.C.E. - whose operator gained a cross of war to the V.M. - in which the action of an unit of M. V was evidenced S.N. that it concluded itself victorious hoisting the tricolor on the summit of the mount. The film provoked comments between relatives and friends of alpine of the division, that they knew of the facts a different version, and the thing reached to a lieutenant of coy., than had been struck on the slopes of the Spadarit for four months, remaining hurt and earning a silver medal and one of bronze to the V.M. the official wrote to house a pair of disdain letters, letters that the censorship of Bolzano signaled to the Authority Centers them. *Deinde* inquiry. Invited to supply justifications, the lieutenant said frankly that the camicie nere on the Spadarit had arrived to done things and that "*on 14 April, the last day in which has been fought on the that mount, the last Fallen and the last wounded belong to my company, the 74th of the Bassano. And not there was no camera operator who same to resume the action and to deserve a reward for valor military*". All the hierarchical chain, from the commander of or the alpine to the commander of the *Pusteria*, supported the official vigorously, depreciable the false. The Historical Office of the S.M.R.E., interpellator in its turn from the Ministry of the War, emphasized the facts and advised to withdraw from the circulation the indicted document, excluding the adoption of whichever disciplinary provision to cargo of the lieutenant.

21) DS Comand 11^a Army, f, 0280003/op. data 14.4.1941

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

it met, until to the morning of the 15th, hard resistance between the Mali and the Trebeshines, not much dissimilar one from that had arrested it in March. To its left, but, the *Cacciatori* division of the IV Corps managed in such a way to proceed from Threpeli towards south on the Mali, threatening the Greek defense of Deshnices valley and allowing the VIII to earn land towards Suka and Klisura. It facilitated, soon after, the march of the VIII also the XXV Corps, the whose divisions of the left wing (*Legnano* and *Sforzesca*, with the 3rd grenadiers) hunted the Greeks from the Trebeshines and they showed oneself the morning of the 16th on Klisura. The defense of the village and particularly that one of the castle of Klisura and the mount Groppa, that dominates it, was obstinate and rich assault and counter assault, much to demand an entire day of combats for being won. To the first hours of the 17th under the arranged action of the troops of the two army corps, returned Klisura to Italian hands.

The center and the right of XXV the Corps and the army corps with Gen. Messe they were struck from the 13th to the 17th without to succeed to open a passage in the opposing lines between the Dhrinos and the sea. The Greeks until the 16th substantially maintained in feet the alignment of the infantry and the artilleries and knew to draw the maximum fruit from the optimal organization to defense that had created in those fields. The participation of the *Casale*, until then never employed, concurred valid the 17th to giving grace blow to the Greek rearguards, on which so that the unavoidably repercussions also the material and moral effect of the fall of Klisura.

The 17 April, after four days of fight, the alignment of the opposing rearguards from the Tomori to the sea was collapsed: the left of the army, with the *Pusteria*, attested at Erseke; to the center the *Bari* went back go the Vojussa valley towards Premeti, while in it valley of the Dhrinos the divisions *Ferrara* and *Casale* was approached to Argirocastro; the extreme right, somewhat more rear, was to port Palermo. It can be said that the pursuit was begun, but even if a division of the Greek II Corps crumbled as soon as begun the retrograde movement, even if a regiment of other division had mutinied the 13th and the soldiers had headed to groups towards the western Macedonian from where they came, even if in many units signs of tension were manifested, other units was still struck proudly. The 18th, the 11th Army Command operated a reshuffling of the forces: the *Pusteria* was placed to the dependencies of the XXVI Corps and the *Cacciatori delle Alpi* to those of the VIII Corps; the Commander of the IV received the *Siena* and the *Sforzesca*, located between Tepeleni and Klisura, and passed in second

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

formation. Of the XXV Corps they came maintained in the front lines the divisions *Lupi di Toscana*, *Casale* and *Julia*; in second the *Ferrara* and the *Modena*. The *Brennero*, - that by now acted in the area of the special army corps came last to this last one.

The advance was, therefore, continued with three Corps, each operating along one director and with an axis of supply; it was not possible, given the insufficient street net, to adequately serve a greater number of major unit in motion, of it however the situation demanded a greater amount of forces. Perhaps minor a number of divisions in the first formation would have been sufficient, but account of the eventuality was wanted to be held that the adversary, struck but not sure control, still opposed resistance with all that that it remained to it on a sufficiently sturdy rear position, which the border line or that one of the Kalamas and, consequently, became necessary to face a new battle in open field. Such possibility, that for it were not from excluding itself, had been marked by the Comando Superiore. The pre-chosen formation, while a quick progression concurred acceptably, constituted a able alignment to face every possible eventuality and a staggering in such depth to allow any maneuver.

The more important difficulties were represented from the roads: all the bridges, large and small, and there were many, had been blown up; attend the mined fields sent; most frequent the interruptions, much easy in that atmosphere mount where the roadways often run to along the coast or in deep incisions. The interrupted works of art on the three roadways towards the south - Port Palermo Konispoli, Tepeleni - Kalibaki and Gllava - Klisura - Perati - Kalibaki - and on the cross-sectional Edda Port - Delvino - Giorgucat, was 52; a good 49 street interruptions from landslides. In only the section approximately twenty kilometers between Q. Chiciocut, where the line of resistance of the VIII Corps ran, and Klisura, 18 interruptions of varied type, important impediment for the movement of the divisions *Cagliari* and *Bari* were found, much more than everyone than the Greek rearguards drew profit in order to oppose delaying resistances and to hinder and to slow down the repair work. The infantries naturally, succeeded to pass the same one with the transported by pack animal batteries, but they could not immediately be continuations from the artillery horse or motorized, for which it was necessary to construct ramp of connection and to restore the destroyed bridge. The work were lead with remarkable rapidity; engineer units of the divisions, of the army corps and of the army came projected with the vanguards,

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

behind which they followed the working companies and nuclei of civil laborers of the enterprises, that they completed and they consolidated the first work of repair.

In the enemy area, even if the discouragement, the distrust, the fatigue generated episodes of indiscipline, relaxation and of desertion, still no substantial disorder had taken place between the rows of the army of the Epirus: it withdrew under a continuous pressure, was tried from six months of hardest fight, but it conserved the will to fight against the Italians. The rearguards were struck until the last one with a worthy courage of the highest consideration. However separate elements were manifest. The SAMO, that from Korçano had begun the withdrawn towards Kastoria, sight cut the road from the German penetrations, flowed back towards the Epirus through the Pindo without more consistency, that induced Gen. Papagos to modify the articulation of command. From 19 April the SAMO assumed the denomination of III army corps, passing to the dependencies of the Section of Army with the Epirus. In the last week of war, therefore, this it had to the dependencies:

- I Corps (Gen. Demestikas) with the 2nd, 3rd and 8th Inf. Div. to it from the sea to the valley of Dhrinos;

- II Corps (Gen. Bakos) with 4th, 5th, 6th, 11th, 15th and 17th Inf. Div., from the valley of Dhrinos to the valley Vojussa;

- Group divisions of Borova (Gen. Zeipoulos) with 1st and 16th Inf. Div. on the axis Erseke- the bridge of Perati.

- III Corps (Gen. Tsolakoglou) with 9th, 10th and 13th Inf. Div. and division of cavalry on the Pindo, in the zone of the Metsovo, eastern front.

On 19 April the 139th infantry of *Bari*, more advanced element of the VIII Corps, came arrested from a violent fire of automatic arms and artillery in correspondence of the Carshaves stream, ten of kilometers ahead to the Perati bridge. The fatigue of the troops, in motion without stopping from four days, imposed a time of arrest, during which the 140th infantry was placed side by side to the 139th. For all the day of the 20th, the bitter combat was maintained, indeed the Greek resistance was acquiring force pushing armed nuclei of machine-guns on the left of the Vojussa, the northern layer of Mt. Tumba, and preventing with such flanking action any movement on the roadway. As a result of that Gen. Gambaro ordered to the 63rd infantry of the *Cagliari*, just arriving on the scene, to carry out a turning to short beam on the right of the Vojussa and to a battalion of the *Cacciatori* to pass the water course on one

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

footbridge and to reject the elements that give the event of the river hindered the *Bari*. These provisions determined the collapse of enemy resistance.

The defense of the bridgehead of Perati abandoned the game and in the night on the 22nd it was withdrawn beyond border. At 05:30 of the April an official of the G.S. of the *Bari* division Command made contact at the bridge of Pelati with a German formation. They arrived soon after, from Leskoviku, the motorcyclists coy. of the 4th bersaglieres and then the *Lancieri di Milano*. Thereafter the 63rd infantry *Cagliari* and the 140th infantry *Bari*.

In Dhrinos valley, since the first hours of the 21st, the *Casa*, exceeded with the 11th infantry and XVII bersaglieres Bn. of the quick group "Solinas" the last interruption - on the Xerias -, and rejecting to delaying nuclei, it was introduced in front of Kakavia where it came invested a most violent fire departing from the hilly line of border. The fight, that it provoked sensitive losses, continued for all the day, extending also to north of the Dhrinos, to the work of the alpine "Signorini" group, that it had caught up the saddleback of Radati, on the southern layer of Mt. Bureto. A little after midnight of the 21st a new attack of the *Casale* had however reason of the extreme Greek rearguard and it turned it in escape carrying itself to Arinista, in Greek territory. Here making contact, towards 08:00, with a German armored unit, whose commander already declared to be in action the armistice. Nearly at the same time the *Lupi di Toscana* and the *Julia*, than passes with the 8th alpine the "Signorini" group, entered in Greek territory eliminating the residual strength.

A true battle not been had but the last effort had been equally bloody. The losses of the 11th armed from the 14th to the 22 April amounted to in fact to 4,820, therefore left again: 65 dead, 250 wounded and 5 missing among the officials; 900 dead men, 3,500 wounded and 100 missing among non-commissioned officers and troop.

4. THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE ARTILLERY AND THE ENGINEERS.

A side comment, is also much short one - it is lawful to reserve to the employment of the artillery and the army engineer corps. The great amplitude of the fronts assigned to the armies; the fortuitousness's, often very remarkable, of the mountainous land that separated between of they the fields held by the army corps; the great lack and the limited logistic ability to the roadways, nearly all with normal course to the resistance line,

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

that that rendered the movements in lateral sense long and difficult; and finally the lack of modern gun tubes with long throw, suitable for a war fought in similar conditions, were all negative factors for one true and own organization of army artillery. Reason for which the two Commanders of artillery they had always a strongly reduced constitution, neither ever decided in just of some of the indispensable elements for an independent operation: grouping of army, unit specialist, arranges of the transmissions, etc. In such conditions yields necessary for getting off center itself to the draft, heavy artillery army corps little available for good part from the batteries from position of the 13th artillery of the Guard to the frontier, entrusting the part of the first actor to always good, but by now too much old one, gun from 149/35. The own means lack forced also to put off center to the other organization army corps that in normal circumstances would have been of pertinence of the army, which the aerial and land observation, the far interdiction and the counter-battery.

Of the army corps artillery did not exist in all in Albania that the 26th regiment, constituted from three groups of 105/28 and three from 149/13. It was assigned nearly entire to the XXV Corps, except one group of 105 that was yielded to the XXVI Corps, in the area of Korça. The XXV and then also the VIII Corps, had everyone in reinforces one battery from 149/35 of the 13th artillery of the Guard to the frontier. It was be a matter of batteries from position and therefore they did not have that two tractors and of insufficient efficiency. Consequently the changes of position, much attended during the withdraw maneuver, they could not be executed that to groups and with the aid of other means supplied from the army corps. Obviously that constituted a heavy ball to the foot, especially for the VIII Corps, that did not have other means of towing beyond those of the battery from 149/35, also they in little order. The 9th army arranged in all and for all only two groups: that one, cited, from 105/28 and from 149/13 of the Guard to the frontier, initially assigned to the XXVI Corps and then transferred to the III. They completed the organic divisional alignment the groups, on which but the hard combats begin had recorded them considerably.

Considering, therefore, the important extension of the front of the armies, the possibilities of the artillery turned out truly poor. It deserves of being emphasized the firmness of the artillerymen in remaining until the extreme limit of possibility on the more advanced positions in order protect the withdraw here of the infantries, let alone their spirit of sacrifice

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

in order to save pieces in every situation. In order to comprise the entity of the efforts that had to be completed, enough to think next to the great number of gun tubes transferred with trucks and tractors in the zone of alignment and therefore left without possibility to move for lack of means of transport. This obligated to withdraw pieces in relay and the case of having was not rare to return on the place and to recover the last pieces when already the position had been occupied by the enemy. That in spite of the great mass of the artilleries could be always carried to safety.

As far as the operation of the army corps artillery Commands deficiencies were found not very inferiors to those found at the armed level. For months nearly all the Corps, of army had the regularly constituted artillery Commands, but without the relative specialist unit nor the Commander of grouping of C A., Lacked, therefore, means in order to organize a convenient net for the observation and the survey of the targets, task this that became more and more difficult since the higher localities, and consequently more suitable for the observation, always ended for falling in the hands of the adversary. To the XXV Corps, instead, unit specialist and Commando of grouping existed, but a Command lacked true and own artillery: this was reduced, exactly, to the person of a colonel sent for - the head office duties but absolutely lacking in officers, staff of order and means. Such situation lasted nearly to the end of the defensive phase, when they were sent from Italy the necessary organs. In the meantime it had been attempted to substitute for, as always happens in these cases, removing personal and means here and here from various the units. While it graduates to become stabilized itself of the front, the always better acquaintance of the land, the shipment from part of the artillery Commander of the Comando Superiore of catalogues of the geodetic elements for the various zones and the new arrival numerous artilleries, allowed to approach again itself to the prescribed norms of employment and to always improve more the organization of the alignment with it turns out worthy of note. Of the crescent increase of the effectiveness of the shooting confirmation from the direct vision of the observatories was had and from the declarations of the prisoners, which in the phase begin had not manifested them excessive preoccupation for the Italian fire, and also of the specialist squares who during the final advance traveled over again the battlefield carefully controlling the effects of the artillery shooting.

For the technical part, it can be said that the topographical preparation in the zone of alignment and the observatories turned out, without exceptions,

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

perfect, but or little null it was possible to make in the zone of the objectives. Screen unfortunately natural prevented often a very useful determination, such that in order greater part of the objectives here came made resorted to the topographical map, than, at scale 1:50.000, it did not turn out very convenient.

On the true and own ammunitions re-supply it is more times pointed out to the issue of the roads and means of transport. It is from adding that such negative factors induced to accumulate near the lines of the pieces, in forecast of offensive, strong actions amounts of ammunitions, much advanced to how much would not have been necessary if an adapted means availability of transport had been able to concur a timely reinstatement of the rounds consumed. Of it great ammunition amounts achieved the large disadvantage to hold in order much time exposed to the inclemency, not existing possibility near the lines of the pieces of conveniently sheltered and, therefore, remarkable percentages of launch charges were stated and of incendiary deteriorated. The units, in several the movements that had to complete, they could carry to the continuation only one minimal share of the equipments, and therefore were forced to organize with makeshift means the recovery of nearly the totality of the munitions remaining on the previous positions. Since such disadvantages, much serious, carried to inefficiency let alone to squander and damaging of ammunitions and material, it is well to emphasize that they would not have been taken place, for less in great part, if the various units were arriving in Albania mobilized to 100% in all the equipments.

The activity of greater importance of the engineers came explained in the field of the work. The Comando Superiore had initially the 26th grouping, whose units between 10 November and first of December nearly remained always dispersed to the two armies.

To they time, being the circumstances, the units assigned the armies was in order much time further dispersed to the army corps for employment and deployment reasons. And, for recorded, in November more than once they took place online in order to reinforce the positions held by the exhausted infantries. It was only to begin from the second half of March that the army engineer corps Commands had some availability in just. The arrival, in fact, of the troops of the engineers of major unit was very slow that to the term of the hostilities the IV Corps had not still received its handicraftsmen Bn. and the special army corps could simply make use of one handicraftsmen coy.. To the urgent and important

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

necessity of the divisions was necessary to supply with the hundred laborers. In purpose it can be asserted that the rendering of the civil units, but exceptions, he was not equal to that one of the engineers, even if the work they was demonstrated precious: much better could sure have made if they had been organized and equipped as established from the employment contract.

Between the work, those of field fortification assumed a particular value. The first engagement was turned to the strengthening of the line reached by the "*Ciamuria*" C.A. in mid November. That it came completed in little days realizing a ten of kilometers of barbed wire in the zones of Konitsa, Perati and Delvinaki, while others six kilometers were spread in the valleys of the Phrinos to the height of Kakavia and an other line was begun from Radati to Delvino. Soon after all the working hundred they were concentrated at Tepeleni and Klisura for the immediate beginning of the works for the previewed strong points, from P.R. 12. The effort was truly one of note: approximately 2,000 laborers of the various enterprises were engaged for 9 strong points from Bençe to Zhepova; others 1,500 in the field of the shoreline to the head of the Sushça valley and to Q. Vestes. On 12 December the work of the weather on the coast and in the field of the XXV Coprs was completed. From then the C.A. engineer Commands they will receive the assignment to preside directly to the continuation of the preparations; but, evidently, the VIII and the IV Corps to January was only found in a position to operating on one position of definitive resistance. About mined fields it was spoken very little. Simply a thousand of antitank mines and a few more than six thousand antipersonnel mines astride of the guidelines of the Vojussa and the Dhrinos.

In the field of the street work enough to say that near the Field army Quartermaster corps never the Directions of the roads were not constituted, so that from the rears of Army to the defensive position the acted only engineers Commands.

It is necessary, finally, to stop itself shortly, to complement of how much gradually has been placed in prominence, on the issue of the connections. The vastness of the divisional fields, and therefore of army corps, at first and the release of the divisions in accordance to the weather, let alone the poverty of the street communications and the organic deficiencies of the units, placed in most primary work the structural problem, denouncing the devoid vision of the war with which said problem it had been studied and resolved. Making resorted to it only withdraws of all the kinds was possible to the engineer Commands to face in some way the requirements. There is however to observe that little not previewed

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

from the organic was available, to the point that the benefit of inflow of the new units of connection was immediately cancelled from the arrival of other divisions lacking in the units of the engineers, remained at the boarding ports, and this disadvantage lasted in order nearly all the duration of the operations. From the dramatic situation it begins them slowly - in which the telephone net was activated by Albanian personnel and some fields of the front were use from a telephone line of the police (pro-English) -, very slow, was reached to a system of the transmissions acceptable.

But one was already nearly to the end of the winter. To part the vicissitudes of the combat, too many were the difficulties to exceed: the type and the quality of the greater part of the radio stations; the constant lack of batteries⁽²²⁾; the lack of cord telephone; the deficiency of specialists and the deficient training of the recalled, not only of the engineers but also of the artillery and infantry regiments, they too much imposed often the employment of messengers on long distances. Until December, in fact, the troops of the connections engineers - beyond those, of course, of the divisions it begins them - were the units dispersed from the 26th grouping: one company wirelesses operators for army. The lack arrival of means of transport: the companies had in average the 30-40% of the motor vehicles previewed from the volumes of mobilization. To all these defects, for as to say "of origin", the criterion of always giving the precedence in the arriving and departures in the disembarkations to the battalions of infantry and the groups of artillery on the units transmissions.

5. THE END OF THE WAR.

The idea to start negotiations with Germany was sprouted gives vary long time between the commanders of elevated rank of the Greek army. Already at the end of February, when that is it had been begun to outline the German threat; the Generals Drakos and Pitsikas, to head respective of the Epirus and Macedonia areas, had been convenes at Athens and put to the current of the intention to strike itself against the eventual Germanic aggression asking the aid for Great Britain. On 10 March the Diadochos, Prince Paulo, in his visit to the Albanian forehead, had been stopped at Dervicani, center of the I Corp Command,

22) The devoid of supply of M 1 batteries provoked nearly to the total disabling of stations R.F. 1 in equipment to the infantry

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

and he had asked the Gen. Kosmas and to his division commanders if they thought possible a Greek resistance, without aid of Yugoslavia and Turk, of front to an Bulgarian-German offensive. The opinion of those present was unanimously negative: also being in majority pro-English, the Generals saw them much and to long expiration a British aid difficult and thought that of front to the Germanic participation the Greek army, already very seriously engaged against the Italians, would be ended in imprisonment and the country would have run the risk of the destruction. Indeed, the commander of the 4th Inf. Div. Gen., Boulalas, similar war would have compared to the "defense against a earthquake" or the "flagellum of God". To made accounts, they therefore convene on the opportunity to resort to an agreement with the Germany in order to avoid useless massacres and damages. The hereditary prince did not make many comments, limiting himself to communicate, from part of the King, the decision that the armies of the Epirus and the Macedonian would have had to continue to fight even if taken to the rear by the Germans.

Gen. Kosmas, after the report, asked to the commanders of division and some senior officials of greater level to put for written their thought, that they confirmed much said already. Not only but also Gen, Papadopoulos, commander of the II Corps, were declared of the same warning: it was necessary that the politicians avoided at all costs war with Germany. Evidently the thing assumed dimensions that could not be ignored. He convened at Gianina by Gen. Drakos, the two commanders of the army corps newly represented at the Diadoco the unanimity of their thought on the crucial point. The Supreme command took part then and all the generals of very high rank were called to Athens. The meeting, happened on 5 March, had rather to be stormy because generals Kosmas and Papadopoulos was immediately placed retired seems quite had asked the substitution for the government with whom mainly it represented the public opinion - and on 8 March Gen. Drakos was exempt from the replaced assignment and in the command of the field Epirus by Gen. Pitsikas, which, in its turn, it yielded to Gen. Tsolakoglou that one of the Section of Army with western Macedonian. The war, therefore, continued with the precise directive to resist to the Italians, in any case, without take care of what could happen on the Bulgarian front. Still on 15 April, when as soon as the withdrawn one of the army of the Epirus was begun, the King personally and Gen. Papagos wrote to Gen. Pitsikas, that he had proposed to ask for a armistice, speeding up to a fair fight:

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

"(...) they are perfectly to acquaintance of the situation - said the King - but the honor, the interest of Greece and the fates of the Nation exclude every thought of yield, in how much the moral catastrophe deriving from this would be incomparably worse than whichever other misfortune. I make appeal your patriotism, as soldiers and Greeks, and I exhort to do yours duty until to the end. It does not have to forget that continuous the British army to fight for the defense of our Country";

and Papagos:

"In spite of the difficult situation (...) I exhort and I order to make every strained humanly possible in order to contain the units, to restore the discipline and to defend the National ground step by step. The Country attends as always that all the officers, from highest to smallest, complete theirs duty until to end"⁽²³⁾.

But the threatened withdraw to carry out itself too much to fast and gave much to little hope. On 16 April the I Corps was still on the defensive positions; the II Corps was rotating towards the south making hinge on the 4th Inf. Div., at Klisura, otherwise its extreme right had been exceeded by the *Pusteria*, than it headed to Erseke in order to take to the rear or on the flank the group of divisions of Borova, and the 4th Inf. Div. had lost the support of the Trebeshines. In these circumstances, the 16th, Pitsikas reiterated the proposal in dramatic terms: "*As a result of the situation that has been created is absolutely necessary a political intervention. Hour by hour the situation gets worse*"⁽²⁴⁾, and sent to Athena his own deputy of the G.S. Col. Grigoropoulos, in order to support the urgency of the stipulation of an armistice. Papagos waved, uncertain on what is to be done. Just in those morning, a talk with Gen. Wilson, had to accept the withdraw of the British expeditionary Corps from the line of the Aliakmon to that one of the Termopoli, therefore the decision to throw the arms would have exposed it to a judgment of disloyalty from part of the ally, condemned nearly sure to the destruction or the imprisonment. For their part, in Tessaglia some possibility for the Greeks did no more exist, since the disarrangement of the troops of the Section of the Army with western Macedonian was being sheltered near the pass of Metsovo.

Papagos recognized the inevitability of the resource to negotiations, but it absolutely did not mean - in order just account - compromise, of forefront to England, inasmuch as the government of Athens had become firm on the course of the hostilities, so that at the end of the war Great Britain,

23) Greek S.M.E., op, cit, vol. IV, pag. 173.

24) Ibid.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

for sure victorious, rewarded generous the fidelity of the ally. Therefore, free course had to be left to the events, in attended that expectably the next fall of the government concurred an agreement with the Germans, After all, sent back to Gianina Col. Grigoropoulos with the order that the army of the Epirus for the moment continued tidily withdraw towards the borders in waited for of directives. Then he spoke with the King, which he met at the royal palace of Tatoï the famous meeting of 18 April with the British military heads. The meeting closed without decision and had been brought up to date to the next day, place that was in arrival Gen. Wavell. In the afternoon but the Council of Ministers for a political examination gathered. The argument had ignited tones. The points of view were three: immediate beginning of the negotiations of yield; transfer of the King and the government to Crete and abandonment to their fate of the Greek army and the British Corps; resistance in Epirus until to completed boarding, or nearly of the English. The minister of the war, Papadimas, had given to acquaintance of one communication of Gen. Bakos, commander of the II Corps, what stood the more difficult part of the withdrawnal. It was a more meaningful message as well as in how much supported the insistence of Pitsikas in order to conclude the hostilities and came from the one who had to the direct orders the bulk of the army of the Epirus, six divisions:

"I have already reported and I return to report that the situation turns quickly to worse. The disorder, the disobedience, the abandonment of place from part of officers spreads in spite of the rigorous measures adopted and the executions. I ask you, in name of God, to immediately take a decision in order to avoid that we must cry on ruins without previous. Anyone thinks to carry the cross of martyr better than me also make and you come to cry much ruin because our tears have been dried up".

But while the ministers discussed, the ferment between generals took them consistency. The two commanders of army corps with Pitsikas, Demestikas and Bakos, consulted with Gen. Tsolakoglou, on 18 April prepared them much a serious message for the government and the Supreme Command:

"The situation of the army does not concur the continuation of combats not even defensives.

We have done what was humanly possible in order to obtain the victory and, now in order to prevent a total collapse.

Our repeated requests they have not had answer. In order to avoid the dishonor of our glorious army, with one rendered to the Italians of which until yesterday it was winning, in order to avoid the anarchy and the ruin of the Nation in the eventuality of a decline of the army, possible eventuality of moment in moment,

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

the impose beginning of negotiations is armistice with the Germans. This asks for through ours the entire Army with the Epirus.

In full knowledge of the meant one and the gravity of much above, we ask you to prevent the catastrophe that overhangs. In contrary case the army of the Epirus will assume historical responsibilities of the front to God and Country"⁽²⁵⁾.

Taking of position of this kind, a true and, just ultimatum and a most serious insubordination in the comparisons of the higher direction, but was not shared from the majority of the division commanders, so that the message was not sent. Gen. Pitsikas however reached acquaintance of something, if not of all, also because he was pressed from the metropolitans of Gianina, Spiridione Vlahos, than were being churned with political desire, and same the 18th renewed the hopeless demanded:

"The situation is reached to a extremely critical point. Units of the 17th division are abandoning Legaritsa, locality that covers the left wing of the group of divisions. The army corps speaks about desertion of men of the 8th division, to division, that Metsovo covers, marks the men in escape. In name of God, saved the army from the Italians"⁽²⁶⁾.

An hour after he telephoned Gen. Mazarakis, new Prime Minister, so that day provoked a decision, indeed the decision. But the conclusions of the meeting with Wavell had been to more continue the fight as long as possible in order protect the re-embarkation of the British troops. To this point Gen. Demestikas and Bakos instructed Tsolakoglou of directly dealing the yield with the Germans, also for their troops. Which that was the situation beyond the Pindo, in Epirus the military heads were intending to constitute a temporary government under the presidency of the metropolitans of Gianina. The morning of the 20th delegates of the army of the Epirus they went to the German lines to begin negotiations, on the base of two firm points: immediate cessation of the hostilities and exclusion of the yield to the Italians. Also it was asked, but without character of prejudicial, the acknowledgment of the temporary government of the Epirus, with jurisdiction on the Greece not occupied by the Germans. Where this desire - inspired to the example of France of Vichy - had been satisfied, the troops would have lay down arms declaring themselves captive. Of the Germans but, not of the Italians. Therefore the columns of the Mar. List would have

25) Greek S.M.E., op. cit., vol. IV, pag. 215.

26) *Ibid*, pag. 213.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

occupied all the Epirus until to the border, blocking the road to the Armies of Geloso and Pirzio Biroli.

At the same time the Supreme command telephoned to Gianina, informing that the Gen. Gianistras had left from Athens for a examination on the place of the situation and ordering to hold the line of border "*until to the moment of decisions*". It was too much late, because towards noon Gen. Pitsikas had to call Papagos in order to put it to the current of the last item of news: Tsolakoglou had notified that it had to be thought to it exempt from the commander, having informed it moreover to have sent to the German delegation for the yield. Consequently, the deprived of authority the commander suggested, was the case that the government removed to a higher court to if the issue. When Gen. Gianistras arrived at Gianina found the state of things that only Euphemistically could say difficult. Pitsikas read the letter written order of the King from vice-president of the Council, Sakellarin:

"I) we become account of the situation totally. You know but that the immediate capitulation would cancel completely the rights acquired with our sacrifices of the sure final victory for the moment allied.

II) Disadvantages of one immediate capitulation:

1) The fate of the army would not be better than that one deriving from one final defeat;

2) The enemy would not be lenient;

3) We would be accused to have abandoned ours allies before giving them time, with a supreme effort, of regulating or improving - as they hope - their position.

III) The resistance until the end introduces the following advantages:

1) The general esteem and pride, for little Greece, to have done own duty;

2) We give to ours allies a sure time for regulating their position.

And this, above all, in our interest;

3) To the end of the war our sacrifices will be rewarded.

Meditated on how much over and fate more of your duty. After to have exhausted every human and superhuman possibility, also the falling captive is not a dishonor. The abandonment of ours allies, instead, would cancel for the Country the sacrifice of our heroic fallen.

Although the dice appeared by now thrown, Gen. Gianistras, rendered account that on Pitsikas not was more from making confidence, wanted to try a last paper asking Tsolakoglou to come to the Commander of army in order to find a way of escape. After a step which what it had completed, Tsolakoglou could not that to answer negatively to any approach. Between the other he awaited the answer from German side. In fact soon after it arrived at Botonasi, a country

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

to some kilometer to the west of Metsovo, headquarters of the Commander of the III Corps, Gen. Dietrich, commander of the 1st Panzerdivision Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, which granted the armistice on the following conditions: cessation of the hostilities between Germany and Greece at 18:00 of the same 20 April and, within some hour, between Italy and Greece for interest of the German Command; interposition of German units between the armies Italian and Greek; withdrawal of the Greek troops within the border Greek-Albanian within ten days, demobilization of the army of the Epirus and Macedonian and dismissal of the soldiers.

To part of fact that Gen. Dietrich demonstrated to completely ignore the real situation in Albania, where the border already had been everywhere reached, there is from asking him if he thought to fight a war to side of the Italians or having to act from peacemaker in a local conflict. However not there is neither much to be astonished of the fact that has to care for the Germanic interests - to close the game very soon - without disables care for the ally: to the very end the Germany had clearly demonstrated with Rumania, Bulgaria and Hungary those that it meant for alliance. In any case, that evening Mar. List arrived at Larissa, implanting own Command. Taken to vision of the document he did not accept it: King George had made a declaration asserting clearly that the fight had to continue until the end, therefore for the army of the Epirus could itself be received the pure and simple yield without conditions, therefore as it was made for the army of the eastern Macedonian. Gen. Tsolakoglou, than did not have choice, had to then sign the 21st a new protocol of armistice with which all the army was considered prisoner of war; as far as the Italians, the thing was left in suspended both for the end of the hostilities and for the definition of the zone of influence:

- 1) Pertaining to the Greek army of the Epirus and Macedonian are consider prisoners of war. The arms, all the war material and all the kinds of supplies of this army are prize of war of the German army.
- 2) The Commander of the German forces in Greece recognizes that the Greek army has fought heroically, maintaining on the battlefield the military honor. Therefore the Greek officials have the honor of the arms (...).
- 3) The Greek prisoners will remain for the moment in concentration camps. After the end of the war negotiations the liberation of all the effective officials and complement is previewed, non-commissioned officers and soldiers.
- 4) With the Italian Comando Superiore in Albania locality will come fixed

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

for dealing the cessation of the war on all the fronts and the execution of the yield, possibly without frictions"⁽²⁷⁾.

The war had a single winner: Germany. The news of such agreement arrived at Athens in morning. It did not have to astonish, in depth, considers the previous events you, however Papagos sent at once a message to Gianina:

"They inform Me that gen. Tsolakoglou has taken the initiative to ask the yield. You must all comprise that the supreme interests of the country to forbid such action.

Make appeal to the patriotism of all.

The army must fight until the extreme limit of its possibilities. Replaced Tsolakoglou immediately".

The telegram reached destination to noon, but Gen. Pitsikas had abandoned the army of Epirus in order to re-enter to Athens. While the contacts between the parliamentarians to Larissa had place, Mar. List sent endured a shipping to Cavallero:

"The Supreme Commander of the Greek army of the Epirus has asked the capitulation for his army stop the negotiations is in course stop In order not to interrupt these negotiations and in order to catch up in short time the end of the hostilities on all the fronts I ask You, on receipt of order of the Fuehrer, to stop at once the advance of the Italian troops and not to exceed the line till now reached stop I ask You to send the German official of connection with airplane to Larissa in order to determine the demarcation line during the time being necessary for the disarmament of the Greek army and in order to define other remarkable particular stop"⁽²⁸⁾.

Knowing the text of the intentional capitulation from Mar. List is difficult much to attribute is also elementary sense of correctness to similar communication. Cavallero followed the advance with the Commander of the 11th Army and received the telegram towards 12:30, through Gen. Ferrero remained at Tiranao. Not being able hold out or in connection with Rome, inform the head of G.S. to read to the message to Mussolini, asking instructions, and to answer directly to the commander of the German 12th Army in his name. Towards 16:00 the answer of Mussolini arrived: "they are decided - Cavallero to List *had to write to receive the question of yield made from the commander of the Greek army*

27) The text of this armistice was rendered from an appeared article 9 May 1941 on General Akropolis, of Athena noted, article inspired from the Tsolakoglou newspaper, than after the yield he had formed the new government.

28) Cavallero diary, date 21.4.1941.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of the Epirus, provided that it is meant that the question is made also the Italian army. It is prestige issue that the Italian army has the right and the duty to make, since from six months it is struck against the Greek army ". It was therefore arrived at dark of the 21st and in the meantime unit of the Leibstandarte they had entered, or better they had been quickly made to pass, for the pass of Metsovo in Epirus so that they headed also and above all to the Albanian border: bridge Perati and Kakavia.

At noon of the 21st a Greek envoy, with white flag and bugler, had introduced the commander of the *Milano* regiment, having informed it to have had news from own Commander of an armistice in action. As a result of the answer of Gen. Pirzio Biroli: *"The armistice is not acceptable until when enemy is not in Albanian territory the advance stop continues decided until Perati bridge & beyond"* ⁽²⁹⁾, the envoy was sent back to the Greek lines and the combat resumed. At 17:00 a new envoy of the Commander of Borova divisions group renewed the demand for suspension of the fight, specifying of in being awaiting of German units with which he would have dealt the armistice or the capitulation. Obviously the retort was that it would have been only accepted the yield to the 9th Army. Moreover Gen. Pizio Biroli cleared to the III - and the XXVI Corps that the operations had to continue with the maximum decision in order to penetrate into Greek territory as deeply as possible in all directions. In case they were introduces envoys, had to be started on Korça, the Commander of the Army, and in the meantime the advanced did not have to endure pause. following The morning, at 06:15, the vanguard of the XXVI Corps (*Milano* cavalry rgt. and the motorcyclists copy. of the 4th bersaglieres) met at the Perati bridge a German detachment. But from Vojussa valley had arrived at the bridge also the vanguard of VIII the Corps with the Commander of the *Bari*, so that the question of the passage of the Sarandaporos was debated from more interlocutors: from the 9th and from the 11th army, behind which he was the Armed forces high command, and from the commander of the German column, to whose shelter refolded the Greeks. Known of the encounter, the Comando Superiore decided that, although the Germans, the advance continued. The forefront to the objection that the Germans blocked the bridge, the Comando Superiore then replied *"to make agreements with the German units on the scene"*. However every doubt or perplexity, of the commanders is advance was soon dispel from the persistent prohibition of

29) Germans DS Comando 9th army, tele 4809/op. dated 21.4.1941, hours 13,25.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

to make to pass small talk. That evening, a message of Cavallero arrived on the subject:

"Along all the guiding lines in which Germanic troops are not advancing decidedly accelerating to the maximum tempo stop Inform me on localities reached" ⁽³⁰⁾.

The *Casale* in the Dhrinos valley, vanguard of the XXV Corps, had exceeded by some kilometer the positions of border in the late evening of the 21st; at 07:30 of the next day it was stopped by German a motorized unit that asked it to suspend the penetration in Greek territory. Gen. Navarini, commander of the division, answered that he had nothing to the contrary except for the small column to go until to the border, if held to us, but that for his account he meant to reach the objective of Hani Delvinaki. Soon after it was introduced, but, a German senior official who specified that the armistice conditions previewed the arrest of the Italian troops to the frontier and that therefore they had to retreat. On the other hand Gen. Geloso, who had decided to remain on the scene and not to continue of force on Hani Delvinaki in order to avoid incidents, waiting with eagerness the prompt instructions of the Comando Superiore. German Gen. Diethle arrived on the scene, in short was agreed to remain both on the place until to that further directives had arrived.

While, just the first news of an armistice between Greeks and Germans was communicated to Mussolini, these, lively hit and made bitter, he addressed Hitler protesting and asking that they did not come interrupted the hostilities without that Italy was present to the negotiations. Hitler had been boarded also from ambassador von Mackensen, sped up in his turn from Ciano that in those days was found to Vienna, and also wanting to avoid a error in the care of the ally, it wished to arrive to more soon to the conclusion of operation *Marita*. Said therefore orders to perceive Mar. List to take time before accepting a definitive engagement and, if by chance he had already signed it, imposed a new clause understanding to include Italy. At 09:00 of the 22nd Gen. Cavallero telephoned to Mussolini, the said news of the contacts with the Germans and the successful departure by air of the commission of armistice, headed by Gen. Ferrero, for Larissa. Mussolini annoyed for as was carrying out all the vicissitude since strongly feared for himself to be seen out of date

30) DSCSFAA, tele 06292/op. dated 22.4.1941, hours 20:40.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

from the irritate Germanic initiative. At 12:45, Cavallero still called: he had just received Gen. von Rintelen and the talk it had been rather agitated. Cavallero briefed at once by Gen. Ferrero:

"The Duce has telephoned me this (12:45) hour informing me that Gen. Rintelen has gone to him and he has communicated that the conditions of armistice for the Greece, which has asked to capitulate but to the Germanic Command.

The Duce has answered that he refuses to enter in negotiations if demand does not come equally addressed to the Italian Command. Rintelen must have communicated at once this declaration of the Duce to his superiors at Vienna.

The armistice conditions contain an acknowledgment of the value of the Greek army and this the Duce is disposed to come to an agreement.

News the Milano regiment has been found today at the Perati bridge of front to a German motorized detachment that has closed its passage. That is in harmony with the famous letter, but than it is exceeded ⁽³¹⁾. Rintelen has communicated that to Vienna. In the wait that Vienna gives dispositions, he has decided that any incident is avoided at the Perati bridge. The other columns are advancing into Greek territory.

All that I have communicated to you for your good government. If the Germans wish it, can participate, with they only, to a examination of the conditions of armistice, but that examination remains preliminary and pure informative, in waiting that the situation is gotten clear (...)" ⁽³²⁾.

At 14:30 Peraldo, sent from the return to Tirana of Maj. .G.S.g. Gen. Ferrero with the text of the report of armistice for approval. Cavallero examined the document with Col. Jacomoni, brought some modifications and agreed on the condition already placed by Ferrero for the company: that a Greek delegation introduced itself to the Italian lines offering the capitulation, to receive which was delegated Gen. Geloso. Nearly at the same time the commander of the German 73rd Inf. Div. represented to Gen. Tsolakoglou that *conditio sine qua non* for the definition of the negotiations was not the explicit formulation of yield to the Italians here. After a bitter argument and the consultation with its commanders of army corps, Tsolakoglou lowered his head. But before, known that the line of demarcation between the zones of influence of the victor ran from Igoumenitsa to Gianina, it was taken care to circulate the order to carry the troops to south of such line so that they did not fall in Italian hand. At 21:00 Col. S.M. Syros, Maj. S.M. Vlahos and the aspirant Foca, were introduced to the outposts of the *Casale*. Lead

31) Draft of the letter written from Mar. List to Cavallero in order to inform him of the negotiations of armistice with Tsolakoglou.

32) Cavallero diary, date 22.4.1941

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

to the presence of Gen. Geloso and shown the credentials, asked the Italian Command *"to name and to send their own representatives for the company of the armistice"*. Cavallero, informed by telephone, replied that to the point in which they were the things it had to be a *matter of yield of all the Greek Armed Forces*. Consequently, Geloso communicated the emissary who the commission Italian-German already was re-united in order to accept the capitulation without conditions of the Greek forces, which it had been offered to the German Command, and added: *"we perceive therefore that your proposal of armistice came from we accepted to the same conditions under which your Command has offered it to the German Command"*. At 02:00 of night the report was *finally signed*. "stopped the fire" entered in vigor from 23:00 hours.

The extraordinary official notice n. 321 of the Headquarters of the Italian Armed Forces circulated the 23 April said them acquaintance of the event in these terms:

"The enemy army of the Epirus and the Macedonian has laid down their arms. The capitulation has been introduced yesterday evening at 21:04 hours a Greek military delegation to the Commander of the Italian 11th Army on the forehead with the Epirus.

The modalities of the yield come established in their particular in complete agreement with the allied German Command".

The same day exited the last bulletin of the Greek Supreme command:

The unexpected dismemberment of the Yugoslav forehead, with the fast advance of the German forces on the plateau of Monastir and consequent the our separation from the army Yugoslav, added to the threat to the rear of our troops in Albania, have totally upset the line held from our forces and they have obligated us to an immense and hurried withdraw. The fast push of German mechanizes means from the region of Monastir towards south and the consequent impossibility to use of the main road for the withdraw of the left wing of our Albanian front, has obliged these forces, that do not have tank destroyer means, to sideways back massive mountains on which the withdraw and supplying are become problematic. The main mass of our forces of the Epirus, than until the last moment had victoriously made facing to double the number of Italian forces, has participated also to the general folding. Its movements are realize in order, in spite of the obstinate reaction of the Italian forces and with repeated it counterattacks that they have carried also to the capture of prisoners. On the other hand numerous aircraft of the Axis, striking without never to be disturbed our troops in withdrawn and the rears, has created difficult conditions for the continuation of a fight learns from part of the Greek forces of the Albanian front against the German and Italian forces and has had for result, the evening of 20 April the capitulation of foretold the our forces to the German forces. It is assessed

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

that in the moment of the capitulation the Italian forces had not succeeded to enter in Greek territory, but they had been contained by our troops in Albanian territory".

In effects, when Gen. Tsolakoglou stipulated the first document of yield to Gen. Dietrich (afternoon of the 20th), the vanguards of the Italian XXV, VIII and XXVI Corps fought in front of the bridge of Perati and at Kakavia and the III Corps had been arrested, no Greek unit having more ahead, to the Macedonia frontier. It would be however petty to be ironic or to argue on some kilometer in more or less astride of the border, being wide comprehensible desire of proclaim not treaded on from at least an enemy, the most opposed - in that moment -, the as ground of the country valorously defended.

At Salonicco, where the endorsement of the end of hostility had been decided had place, not hardly Gen. Ferrero had received the report sent from Cavallero had beginning the meeting of the plenipotentiary. At 14:45 of the 23 April was closed the "convention of capitulation".

They signed Gen. Jodl for the OKW, Gen. Ferrero for the CSFAA and Jen. Tsolakoglou for the army of the Epirus.

Ended the war the occupation began. And this, given the clarity of ideas and relationships elapsing between Italy and Germany, had wide way to make bitter the Italian commanders and, in the first place Gen. Geloso, whose army was chosen for the control of Greece. It must premise that both the Comando Superiore Albania and the Comando Supremo had already from many weeks faced the issue. In the imminence of the counter-offensive in the Deshnices valley, the operations section of the Comando Superiore had put to point a study having for object the conquest of all Greece, exception made for eastern Macedonian and Thrace, of presumed German interest. The design was optimistic because it considered the possibility to obtain clear success, perhaps decisive, from the counter-offensive and the consequent strategic developments, thanks also to the "German pressure" from Bulgaria; in any case sooner or later the campaign would be finished and occupied Greece. The calculation, founded on the ordering of the troops of Albania, previewed with a sure width the 9th Army for all Greece to east with the Pindo, the 11th Army for the Epirus, the Acarnania, the Ionic islands, let alone for Albania.

Similar entity of forces was thought convenient for the period begins them, but in successive age it could sure be thought to a lightening. In the same period the Comando Supremo examined the problem, even if limitedly to the territory to occupy, reaching to analogous conclusion. The limit with the German assigned sector

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

it was seen to the Vardar. Evidently, it was be a matter of forecast of wide principle, than the events, it is worth to say the opening of the Yugoslav front and the operation *Marita*, made to set aside until from the first agreements for the coordination of the operations. On 20 April Cavallero resumed the argument and represented to Mussolini that the movements in course necessarily would be scatter in territorial distribution of the forces involving, for the 9th Army the Montenegro, Ragusa, Kossovo and Dibrano, beyond to Albania; for the 11th Army Greece. The constitution of the 11th Army would be depended from the strategic necessities and the expectable extension of the territory whose occupation would have been entrusted to the Italian troops, therefore asked guidelines in purpose. Mussolini answered: "*timely you will be informed as soon as something will be decided*". Now, already has seen the extreme uneasiness provoked from the lack of agreements clean estimates and without periphrasis between the two allied governments approximately the end of the campaign of Greece, whereas on the operations plan at least the General Staffs had found an understanding wide sufficient. Also the absence of a division between zones of influence - place that the integral occupation was discounted - will damage and, as usual, than more of it will suffer will be the Commanders and units to contact with those Germans, usually in possession of clear orders and specifics, just or mistaken, overbearing or conciliating that they were.

In any case on 24 April the Comando Superiore defined the general forecasts approximately the employment of major unit and the occupation with the-territories of the southern Balcania.

The times of occupation were previewed in relationship also to the evacuation of the territory from the Germanic part.

But connected with the aspect of the occupation there was another important subject that it was to heart to Cavallero and that induced it to turn from Tepeleni, a personal letter to Mussolini in order to provoke a decision:

"According to warning given to me from You⁽³³⁾, Duce, I would have at a sure moment to assume the burden with the General Governor of the Greek territories.

33) A trace of such *warning* does not exist. Only, in date 14 April the diary of Cavallero the excerpt this annotation:

"Hours 20:15 - Resuming the conversation with Ferrero gave the following orders: (...) It must study the organization of Greece and the territories. To study the military organization. This task is entrusted to Bartiromo. He then must study the organization of the Command. The General Governor can hold also the command of the forces, but he does not convene because we have Albania and Greece. Therefore it would be necessary that on the Governor the General Commissioner of the Civil Affairs (Grandi) and the Commander of the Armed Forces depended only, that he would have to his dependencies two Comandi Superiori". Grandi, then, it refused the assignment.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

In these territories forces pertaining to one of the operating Armies will be here located.

The entity of these forces, that they will be a fraction only of that now to my orders, and the nature of the task, flattering but also not inherent to my burden with Chief of General Staff, induce to me subordinately ask you of wanting to consider the subject before translate the warning in official determination.

You allow to me, Duce, with submission to you submitted my desire to resume, to the end of this mission that is in order to conclude itself, the exercise of burdens with Your Chief of General Staff ".

Mussolini did not answer at once. He left to pass a week and null results on the reason of the delay. Only the 27th, at 17:00, melted the doubts of the general Chief of the G.S.:

"Duce communicates to me by telephone - Cavallero annotated - that my letter approves of this totally and that as soon as put to place the things I will return here to Rome".

In spite of the decisions taken in political center, about occupation of the Greek territory still was not spoken. The only firm points were initially the limit of the Igoumenitsa - Gianina road (excluded, but of practicability concurred) between the Italian 11th Army and the German 12th Army, and the engagement of Gen. Tsolakoglou of - to leave to occupy the ports located in the area of jurisdiction of his army. But the 24th Gen. Guzzoni sped up the occupation of Preveza, Arta and at once Missolungi and began the difficulties. It was not possible to proceed to the locality garrison and Greek regions until to when to please the ally not to grant it, and, also when the negotiations were concluded with the attribution to Italy of the task to occupy nearly all Greece, the obstacles rose to every wish pushed out. As soon as 11 May the region to the west of the Pindo until to Missolungi was allowed to the 11th Army to extend its jurisdiction on all, on the gulf of Patraso. Before it had succeeded to send a battalion of bersaglieres to Preveza after feeble and annoying and offensives obstructionisms. The occupation of the entire peninsula, with the exception of center-eastern Macedonian and of Thrace, begun first of June, was completed by the end of July.

Also on the topic of the constituent materials prize of war difficulties rose immediately. On 26 April Gen. Guzzoni delivered a note to Gen. von Rintelen:

"With noted of the 17th current the O.K.W. it has communicated to this Joint Chief of Staff of being disposed to yield to the Italian Armed Forces all

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

not necessary booty of war to the German troops, with the exception of the booty of Thrace destined to the Bulgarian troops.

Gen. Cavallero, for against, informs that in occasion of the company of the capitulation of the Greek army of the Epirus and Macedonia Gen. Jodl has said to Gen. Ferrero (head of the G.S. of the Comando Superiore of Albania) that the war material of the Greek units would be classified to Italy only that have operated to the west of the Pindo.

It is asked with regard to interesting the O.K.W. because it clears its thought and it gives the consequent dispositions to the Commander of the Germanic 12th Army"⁽³⁴⁾

It is easy to find that the tone betrayed the dissent. On the subject not there were some had been agreements: to Italy those went that the Germany granted. Undoubtedly, of forehead to the German victory many pretensions Italy could not advance, but he could use more diplomacy, in order not to say more style.

34) Cavallero Diary, In that same headquarters Gen. Guzzoni observed two further episodes of contrast, had to arbitrary initiatives or wrong interpretations of orders from part of German troops, at Djakovica and Pec and above all at Gianina.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Page 770
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The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Chapter XIV

CONCLUSIVE CONSIDERATIONS

1. THE ACTION OF COMMAND.

In succession three Albania commanders: Visconti Prasca, Soddu and Cavallero. On the plan of the intellectual qualities and the professional preparation they were, without doubt some, of remarkable intelligence and all had previous shining of career. They differed considerably in the character and the firmness of mind, and such differences were perceivable in the respective action of command.

It is not this, evidently, the place in order to pronounce a judgment, since the work of a man must not simply be considered in its whole and for a short span of time; however, when such period assumes historical importance becomes unavoidable is also short comment. Gen. Visconti Prasca⁽¹⁾ was the first one to answer of the failure of the offensive. Already it has been said of the part that he had in the enterprise. Sure he had believed to the political affirmations that Greece would not have resisted⁽²⁾, but similar explanation not the

1) Gen. Sebastiano Visconti Prasca, been born in Rome in 1883, was named second lieutenant in 1904. Participated in the Italian-Turk war and the 1st World War deserving two bronze medals for M.V.. In the post-war period cover important assignments of General Staff: Inter-allied commission Slesia (1920), Council of Army (1924-1930), After to have commanded the 36th infantry (1930-1933), was destined to the Office of the Chief General of the G.S., Mar. Badoglio, (1933-1934) and subsequently commanded to the contingent of Italian troops in the Saar (1934-1935) and thereafter division *Cosseria* 2nd (1935-1936). In 1937 it was promoted to the advanced degree and name Military attaché in Paris (1937-1939). 1 July 1940 was promoted lieutenant general and name Supreme Commander Albania Troops (XXVI army corps), whose the functions had assumed on 5 June.

2) Its more close collaborator, Gen Ricagno, in confidential talk had in mid January 1941 with Gen. Armellini, pointed out to the thing admitting that "*Visconti Prasca has been made to trick a little from all: Ciano, Jacomoni and Soddu, than have then abandoned after promised and flatteries.* (Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., pag. 268).

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

he can acquit it that in minimal part. It returns to the mind, with regard to, one letter that Gen. Cadorna wrote in 1916 to Gen. Bertotti, commander of the expeditionary corps in Albania, which, on disposition of the ministry of the War - from which it depended directly for decision of the Council of Ministers - he had ordered the occupation of Durazzo:

"Any are the instructions that the Government gives to the commander of a expeditionary corps - which are the V.S. case are always the same commander the responsible of the military consequences deriving from the execution of the received instructions. The Government is far away and, for more, incompetent in military matters; and, of other part, whichever operation, even if motivated from essentially political reasons, cannot that be subordinated to its feasibility under the military point of view. Of this the commander of the operating troops is judge, which he must only think himself bound to the attainment of the general order established from the Government; if from the Government detailed instructions leave and in contrast with the safety of the troops, the commander has the obligation to make the military reasons present that are in opposition to the instructions received: if he did not come listened to it he remains the right to ask the exception from the commander.

He achieves that, to my judgment, of whichever failure that was produced at Durazzo, the main responsibility could not go back that to S. V." ⁽³⁾.

In the case of the war in Greece it is obvious that, to greater reason, the speech must be applied also and above all to the maximum level; that does not remove but that the Supreme Commander of the Troops of Albania cannot be considered free from guilt: or he judged the preparation in Albania sufficient and this case was mistaken in the appraisal of the problem, or thought inadequate to must the predispositions and then it had the duty to take clean position.

Gen. Soddu ⁽⁴⁾ offered to find the task of Gen. Visconti

3) Mario Montanari, *Le troppe italiane in Albania*, USSME, Rome 1978, pag. 68.

4) Gen. Ubaldo Soddu, born in 1883, was name second lieutenant in 1904. From 1913 to June 1918 he lend service in Libya, participating to numerous combats and deserving the promotion to lieutenant colonel for exceptional merits and one war cross to the value. Destined to the French front, assumed at Bligny the command of the International 5th infantry, whose colonel had fallen on the field, and in three months he deserved two silver medals for M. V., the French cross of war with palms and the cross of official of the Legion d' Onore. After the conflict it attended the School of War classifying himself to the first place. Subsequently commanded the 89th infantry (1930) and achieves a second promotion for exceptional merits (1934). From 1934 to 1936 he was head of cabinet of Gen. Baistrocchi and then of Gen. Parani to the ministry of the War. Thereafter it commanded the division *Granatieri di Sardegna* and achieved a third promotion for exceptional merits (1936). In December 1937 he assumed the burden with the G.S. Deputy of the Army, from which he stopped in 1939 with the nomination of undersecretary of State for the War, after the promotion to lieutenant general.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Prasca without to have weighed the exactitude capacity. The suspension of the offensive action had made to hope it to collect reinforces necessary in order to straighten the situation quickly. The conditions of the troops; the course of the operations; the urgency to support the line, in constant difficulty, using the units in arrival one at a time; the difficulties of the maritime transports, all that very soon opened his eyes made to comprise that the crisis was not over come quickly. From the optimism it begins passed them to the pessimism and to the anxiety, also alternating these states of mind at moments of hopeful confidence. His then became the unavoidable substitution.

Gen. Cavallero ⁽⁵⁾ received the most onerous inheritance: one diffused moral depression, outlined a defensive line as soon as and from much too wide meshes, a complex of forces that lived to the day, one marked prevention in the own comparisons. He accepted the assignment without batting an eyelid and he was offered to the construction of the "wall" with serene alacrity. He was optimistic by nature and it wanted to strengthen externally such quality in order to bring back the faith around to if and to try to place remedy to errors not his. During his the period of "double command quantity" -in which the his single presence he could not that further to harm to the prestige of Gen. Soddu - it is after 1 January, was taken care to hold to attends Mussolini, to move the levers of the ministerial apparatus, to face the Greeks. In the comparisons of Mussolini sometimes mistook his tactics. Knowing the man, the present situation in optimistic perspective was always psychologically dangerous

5) Gen. Ugo CAVALLERO, born at Casale Monferrato in 1880, was named second lieutenant in 1900. In the 1911 exitet from the School of War, first classified dd course. Nd 1912-1913, from captain, participated to the Italian-Turk war deserving a bronze medal for M. V. 23 May 1915 was destined to the mobilization Comando Supremo, which assigned to the secretariat of the head of the G.S. of the Army, achieving the promotion to Major in the December of the same year. In 1916 it was decorated of the cross of knight of the Military Order of Savoia. Lieutenant colonel in May 1917, in the October was promoted colonel for merit of war and in February 1918 place to head of the operations Office of the Comando Supremo came, obtaining in the June, after the battle of the Piave, the cross of official of the O.M.S. and in the December, after the battle of Vittorio Veneto, the promotion to general sergeant for exceptional merits. In February 1919 was named president of the Italian military Delegation in the inter-allied Committee of Versailles.

In June 1920 he left the service on request, but, recalled in May 1925, was named undersecretary of State for the War, a burden that he held until to 1928 and during which was promoted major general (1927). Newly leaving the army in 1928, still he was recalled in service after eight years (1936) with the degree of lieutenant general and destined then in I.E.A., which Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, assignment that resisted until to repatriation (1940), when achieved the promotion to army general. In the December he assumed the burden of Chief of the G.S. General.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

also say nothing about anything: the difficult moments and, especially, insure to have the intention to deliver counter-offensives to long or short arm: the day came in which it could not more pull away in front of the always greater insistence of the head of government. In his garment of chief of General Staff he had perhaps thought also, like Soddu, to imitate Badoglio in Abyssinia. But the characters were different and must recognize that also the circumstances were. When, on 15 November 1935, Mussolini met Badoglio at the Palazzo Venezia in order to inform him of the decision to send him to E.A. to replace De Bono, the marshal answered:

--I'm well, I'm ready; would want but to ask two things the E.V.: to assigned to which Vice Governor of the Eritrean a general of my confidence; of being able to act, in my new functions, full freedom of action, assuming for against on me all the responsibility of the conduct of the war.

- Who would be the general to which he has thought? Mussolini asked. - Gen. Soddu or Gen. Guzzoni.

- Soddu is head cabinet of the Ministry of the War and he is not opportune that today to leave this place: Guzzoni - Mussolini said - For the rest is taken he will act with that freedom of action initiative and responsibility that competes to his degree and to his burden⁽⁶⁾.

To Cavallero Mussolini, commander of the operating forces, did not have some intention to grant much freedom, above all from when he felt himself "betrayed" by the generals. And if Badoglio could attend with relative calm to the reorganization of the expeditionary corps in E.A., Cavallero more still knew that the doors of Valona and Berat were half-closed and that the Greeks, than Mussolini, they were little disposed to give up time. His fervor and his alacrity succeeded to exceed the painful moment; even if it is right to recognize that to January worse it was already past, and to go back to china. But in operating field defensive obstruction in a position to preventing to the threatened breach of the forehead and the resumption of the initiative with one seems lawful to make a distinction between the constitution of one such counter-offensive to turn upside down the fates of the campaign. If for the preparation of the defensive position and the feeding of the fight on it they can be comprised in sure measure -- not *in slough* - the starter online of incomplete units and the intermingling of the units, less they persuade the counter-offensives try or devise. The counter maneuver of Klisura it is doubt was indispensable and the negative result was discounted; the counter-offensive

6) Q. ARMELLINI, With Badoglio in Eriopia, Milan, Mondadorj 1937 pag. 90.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

in Deshnices valley of the par it could not achieve appreciable results, and if it wore away the enemy wore away also our troops, than just they did not have need to be consumed in unprofitable tactical actions. After the failed counter-offensive of the VIII Corps, Perhaps Gen. Cavallero had a weakness moment; wishing other initiatives of attack, it seemed that he searched the confidence of Mussolini.

But main, the true, error it is probably in not having pursued with tenacity, firmness and hardness the plan delineated since from January in the operating memorandum n. 6, tending to retake at first the Korçano and, subsequently, to the turning of bulk of the Greek forces with long action the Korça – Erseke - Kalibaki director. If every resource had been addressed to that goal, if every effort had been turned to that operation - that then it was executed in April, in very different circumstances - resisting to any allurement or request, in the second half of March to the latest decisive counter-offensive would have been possible. And all and only for our merit. But for two and half months it was necessary to answer NO to Mussolini that whichever for prestige reasons wanted succeeded, to the Commandos of the army that they asked reinforces in order to avoid worse and to desire of giving a little breath to the troops that were macerated in the mud.

The Chiefs found also they who for a back who for another, before unexpected problems. The commanders of armed and army corps arrived in Albania and began to face the situation without a Command, supports operated and services; the division commanders, with exception made for those in place before the outbreak of hostilities, looked at themselves forced to employ the own units as disembarked at Durazzo or Valona. Nearly all covered an inferior degree to that one of the commanding unit. Pirzio Biroli (63 years) was a general of the army, but Geloso and Vercellino (61 years) were generals of army corps. C. Rossi (60 years), Nasci (53 years), Arisio (55 years), Bancale (58 years), Messe (57 years) and Gambara (50 years) were division commanders; the overwhelming majority of the commanders of division (on the 55-58 years) was constituted from Brigadiers. The colonels were on the 50-52 years. The expressed total appreciation from Geloso on the commanders of high level engaged in the war of Greece is strict, but it deserves citation and reflection:

"Remarkable deficiencies have been taken place also in these degrees. Some have not demonstrated sufficient dowries of character, physical robustness, professional ability and initiative in one with the love of the responsibility. Too many perhaps

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

they are joints to a degree elevated in virtue of clerical slave and without to have very comprised what it employment means of the element man and what wants to say active employment of the units on the battlefield"⁽⁷⁾.

That a sure percentage of commanders is demonstrated unequal to the task of the front to the test bench of the war is absolutely normal what in all the armies and whichever conflict, true "sifter" of the heads being war and not peace, than with the usual, expectable difficulties often does not concur one adequate selection. It achieves some that the advance judgment, based on single the *previous* service, is not in a position to operating with safety taken for everyone the maximum limit that it can be concurred, the *Ceiling*. For against the much easiest one it is in war to characterize who has the talent to led, also noticing of the defects, and to promote holding account of his *presumed* ability *also* in the advanced degree.

In topic of "errors" of commanders, for objectivity it is necessary to keep in mind that the failure of a war operation can depend on many causes, between which the greater ability of the adversary or ill-fated execution; the material conditions can some be ignored and psychological in which the commander *must* take on the drum serious decisions, sometimes without neither possessing a exact cognition of the situation: sure that commander of battalion or army corps in other branch with the machine be would ever not have found himself confronted with problems to resolve *alone* and *at once*, if also lacking in necessary means. But that that more interests - to of over of the good or bad test of the individual - is the type of deficiency, since, if repeatedly found, laughed them in certain way to the "system".

The main defects, assessed, regarded own action of command and the government of the personnel. Much too often it was taken place that the participation of the advanced level, from the Comando Superiore Albania to the battalion, was based on the continuous interference, overwhelming, nagging, also in problems of tightened relevance of the subordinate; on the adoption of the method of the "redini corte" also when the inferior Commanders gave test to know to face the events. In the within of the battalions and also of the regiments this serious disadvantage was some unavoidable time because of the technical unpreparedness of the complement officials (not for guilt, naturally); but to a higher step the thing was translate in an injurious intrusiveness in all

7) Relation on the campaign Italian-Greek of Gen. Geloso.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

the senses, especially in the cares of the initiative, while everywhere it comes to lack the confidence in the subordinate does not remain that the substitution. *"It is necessary to accustom also the smaller units to do for themselves-* wrote Gen. Geloso -, *to leave the freedom to mistake, in order to avoid that in combat look to us in wait for... orders "* ⁽⁸⁾.

To assert that it is not existed cure for the conditions of the soldier is pure and simple absurdity, more still that lie, anyone being totally convinced of such fundamental necessity; but it expressed frequently in the simple *technical* worry to organize in the better possible way the services and with rhetorical appeals lacking in substantial effectiveness. Of consequence the officers felt themselves neglected, giving itself for discounted their sense of must, and the soldiers did not know generals. One of first observations of Soddu, when he assumed the command, was just this: *"there were battalions who had not ever seen their major general"* ⁽⁹⁾. Sure covering the lines was translate in hours of march for muleteer without some connection with the Commander of division, and therefore in the impossibility to keep himself posted of the situation, but the absence of the moral impulse deriving from the physical presence of the division commander was an evil that could be alleviated. On the first of February Geloso had to write to the commanders of army corps:

"Some unpleasant episodes of these last weeks and sliminess of the mud, that it renders the distances muleteers for hard work and duration from three to four longer times, induce me to draw Your attention on the location of the places of command of the employee divisions, some of which - from the indications of the graphical situations - to me do not seem such to assure that adhesion grip of the commanders to the lines set up from the characteristics of the fight that we go supporting, from the unfavorable circumstances that the same fight often they have accompanied, and above all from reasons of moral nature (...)" ⁽¹⁰⁾.

In some case it emerged in the field of the conduct of the combat excessive, excessive and hard separation between commander of army corps and units, perhaps but without that shape of insensibility Tepeleni it would have fallen. The critic must however extend also to the operation of the Commanders. From November until to January the insufficient acquaintance of the tactical situation and the state of the troops much he was diffused. A lot depended, as is natural, the slowness to deliver himself up of the Commanders

8) Relation on the campaign cited Italian-Greek.

9) DSCSFAA, f. 11.55/Df.; date 27.11.1940.

10) DS Commando 11th army, f "022183 date 5,2.19,tl.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

in issue, but from more reliable sources it came complained the inexperience of the young officer of the G.S. projects of blow, without adapted practical experience, to places of responsibility in operations:

"Simple exposures of concerning data of fact the situation and the forces always came considered as "difficulty": the order to occupy or to conserve the possession of shares of no value did not ever hold account of the fatigue of the units; the resistances made to the continuous attempts overturn the organic unity of the units came received like passive resistance and not like praiseworthy collaboration to the attempt, risen exclusively in the inferior commands, to place a little order here where chaos has reigned. Almost complete absenteeism from the requirements of moral and material order, taken of position against determines guilty heads to have seen and estimated the situation well and to show suggestions, councils, appreciations: in short, the style of the government, characteristic of the regimen, dominated the events, with the consequences that know all. They were demands to the troops efforts disproportionate to the real contingent necessities, and for against weight to the demands for means was not given too much and for materials above all being necessary in order to make the war. Orders and counter orders attend that they tired and they created distressing situations sometimes; this tumult of changes caught up the overflow in pursuit phase, when the columns that had reached the Greek-Albanian border they reached, in a few hours, varies orders and counter orders petitioners for their bad debilitating execution and not without losses (...)" ⁽¹¹⁾.

A small example seen "from the bottom", seems sufficiently indicative of the frictions provoked from sure bureaucratic customs, little comprehensive of the difficulties in which the battalions themselves debated:

"The army wants to know daily how many meters of barbed wire has been put into work, how many coils have been some employed, how many linear meters of trench have been dig and which depth, how many square meters of pits have been smoothed, etc. Every morning the report of the made work of the day before. But that sense has these figures if the efficiency reached from the positions with that work is not controlled?

And then there are statistics. Dead, wounded, frozen, missing. Residual consumed ammunitions daily and those existing ones near the units: number of rounds per gun, machine gunners, machine-guns, mortars from 45 and 81, hand grenades. All that because the ammunitions lack and is afraid to waste it. And then still given and news of every kind, because every office of the commandos wants to be present and it makes with demands and new active inventions. And nobody thinks that the officials of the companies, that they must supply given and to compile the tables, are from several days to the bivouac on the snow, cargos of lice and fatigue, tormented from the daily bombardments, and they do not have neither personnel tents, nor command tents, nor candle, nor, often, paper to write " ⁽¹²⁾.

There is no doubt that if some given they are indispensable for the valuation of the circumstances, for this does not have necessarily to be

11) Testimony of Gen. M. Torsiello, then Major in the G.S.g

12) G. FATUZZO *Storia della Julia nella campagna di Grecia*, Longanesi, Milan 1970, pag, 209 - 210. Gen. Fattuzzo was then battalion commander.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

. always demands to the units. In the logistic apparatus check points exist that, *where it organized well and well led*, are in a position to supplying *all* the supplies necessary elements. However, the not rare information of nature statistics reached to the combat units during often turn out of insufficient reliability, are for the material impossibility of an exhausting answer, are for the inexperience of the substitutes of the died titular commanders or the wounded, are for the natural intolerance of the combatants in the critical moments to us, For converged, the untimely demands provoke one running hostile psychological reaction to the "Commanders".

Finally, it outside does not seem place to point out to the feelings that lodged between the units. That the war was not felt can be given for discounted, and the unexpectedness of the event and the absence of contrasts that could hit the popular feeling or the fantasy. Probably motivations of a sure relief in Albania for the famous irredentism existed, but not sure in Italy, neither the fascist propaganda never succeeded to make to hate the Greeks. The commanders of troops - in the greatest majority, if not in nearly the totality - in making appeal to determines moral and psychological values, they did not take cue from the words of order of Mussolini but they tried for "the need of the office" explain to the better one meant and causes of the conflict, and in combat they headed decidedly at the regimental or Corps traditions of. To assert that this action has been lead with incisive eloquence perhaps is risked. Reading again the orders of the day and directives of some heads more it elevated in degree, often finds the false note of a rhetorical that, yes, was typical of the regimen, but that, it must convene some, always it has been I let go diffused in our habits. However, it would be unjust to deny validity to the carried out action of command, above all in the smaller units, extremely difficult conditions: the soldier has always answered positively to the officer, when he has felt itself "guided" from who shared his pains and his hard work. Unfortunately not always the officer turned out technically prepared to carry out his functions well, and also when it was demonstrated evidently inferior to the task for deficiencies of character, of mind or physics, the blame cannot fall back entire on him: guilty before was the lacked selection.

2. The Binary Division

To support that the responsibility of the events that have characterized the Greece campaign is from attributing itself that is to the adoption of the binary division with two regiments of infantry, is clearly absurd,

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

but that type of organic effectively exercised on the Greek forehead a not found negative influence in the other area, in which the lack of infantries armored and motorized overwhelmed any regulating defect. In Albania, where the division of infantry as such could be considered adequate - to judge from the equipment and the armament of our units - to the natural atmosphere and the enemy arranged against it of infantry on foot, the binary failed and, without much exaggeration, it was involved in the failure plans and device. But it can proceed for order, being meant to put in evidence as surveying cannot be arrested to the simple depression of a divisional ordering lacking in real operating consistency, but must address with very greater severity to collateral aspects strangely neglected.

On 22 November 1937 Gen. Pariani, undersecretary of State for the War and Chief of the G.S. of the Army, addressing a meeting of 65 General officers (until the degree of divisional commander) in order examining, among other things, the constitution of the binary division⁽¹³⁾.

The subject was such only so to speak. For none the first argument touched on the study of organic issues "after the introduction of the binary"!

Gen. Pariani put in front of the audience an explanation that in truth was a principle an affirmation:

"The concept of the binary was born at first from necessity: than that one, in contrast with the increase of means assigned to the divisions, can be reached to a lightening of the same divisions, with the simplification of the relative functions of command because the ternary division has turned out much too heavy, to difficult to command and to difficult to employ.

During the Ethiopian campaign they have already been introduced in the division of infantry of the modifications that have lead towards the binary. The goal to lighten the units in order to obtain a simplification of command functions. They were created of the units of reduced force, of varied fire power, to which it was attempted to confer the possibility of maneuver and impact.

Beyond to this necessity, stated on the battlefield, it has come outside the issue of the cover. Nearly all the army corps in charge with the cover have felt the need to form a reserve embezzling the third regiments from the divisions that had it. But this reserve will not turn out amalgamated because only constituted on the action of the mobilization.

Therefore the problem to face newly will be that one of the availability in order to constitute is the partial reserves, is those of the Comando Supremo.

13) S.M.E. Uff. History, *L'esercito italiano fra la 1a e la 2a guerra modale* , Rome 1954 report of the meeting appendix 29.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Always in composition of development of theories, the necessity of easy transportable major unit appears also, for having always maneuver possibility. Therefore necessity to quickly move easy and major unit from one point to the other of the front.

All this however has been made in the organic concept to lighten and to simplify the operation of the doctrine. Hand by hand that it advanced this concept, is inasmuch as passing from the ternary to the binary, a maneuver function was ended with removing to the division and, therefore, it is arrived to the conclusion that for the binary division must be thought: that the division loses its ability to maneuver in order to transform in penetration and assault column advancing the maneuver as specific function of the army corps ".

Then Pariani optimistically passed to outline a picture much on the developments of the maneuver transferred to the level of army corps, without to attribute excessive weight to the insufficient objections. It is clear, but, than the conception of the binary had not been hastily formulated and accepted: to part its test during the campaign of Ethiopia with the divisions *Assietta*, *Cosseria* and *Metauro*, had been experimented in the summery maneuvers of the 1937 in Sicily in a series of tending practices to examine modality of action of the offensive, articulation of the forces and the divisional field in the approach and the attack, ability to penetration of the division, alignment in defensive, employment of the artillery, measuring of the artillery and accompaniment fire, organization and operation of the services.

Only ... evidently the necessary attention to the usury that the new elementary major unit would have endured in combat, to the problems had not only been that is would have provoked, is some for the unavoidable substitution or passing over for the requirements of complements.

Of present a good many remained silent, many accepted the binary explicitly, least expressed to seem contrary. Between the supporters they figured commanders assigned to touch with hand, and in burning way, the unhappy choice: Guzzoni, Visconti Prasca, Soddu, Vercellino, Arisio, Nasci, Mercalli, Pafundi. Among the most fervent assertors of the possibilities offered from the new formula was Gen. Soddu. Pariani and Soddu absolutely were convinced of the goodness of the solution. The first one wrote:

"It is to all the famous decision of the Duce to constitute the element base for the maneuver - unitary, inseparable, slender and powerful all at the same time - in the division of new type, constituted from three regiments: two of infantry, one of artillery.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

The function of this unit has been clearly established. Powerful pawn of maneuver, has an only task: to advance adapting to the land, regulating fire and movement, so as to guarantee the advance with minor the number of losses. Lightened from the incrustations formed during the trench war, has become suitable instrument to the "tactics of the water" because, slim and of such ease of handling to concur immediacy of employment, rapidity of substitution, great facility of changes in the guiding of action (...).

Its commander - not bounder from designs than maneuver, from fears for the flanks and the rear, from the doubt not to have sufficient forces in order to adorn the counterattacks - can impart to his unit lively rhythm of dared and sent measures because he knows that behind of him is a comando superiore who directs and watches; that he supports with powerful means and supplies with his reserves to overwhelm gaps, protect flanks, to adorn counterattack (...)"⁽¹⁴⁾.

And second:

"the division with three regiments of infantry, created in 1926 with the task to *hit*, to *penetrate* and to *maneuver*, if it had been weighted down with the numerous infantry-support weapons that are necessary today to the infantry in order to proceed, would have revealed a much too complex an organism and difficultly articulate on the battlefield, where, in order to apply the concepts of the war of express course, it is necessary to realize a powerful and continued attack, by means of the participation of agile and easy maneuverable major unit. It was necessary therefore:

a) to divide the two actions of the combat - *collision and penetration-maneuver* - being entrusted each to a major unit.

b) *to realize a type of powerful major unit, but of more elastic employment, that it could acquit a greater rendering, it is the task to hit and to penetrate*, it is that one to represent the base element of the maneuver to carry out itself in the tactical atmosphere to more favorable, and that is in the picture of the army corps.

To come therefore to the constitution of the division with two regiments of infantry and a artillery regiment. By now each of the two essential actions of the offensive combat is entrusted to distinguished major unit, of easy maneuverability, easy transportable, equipped of offensive power adapted to the normal tasks, and operating in the picture of the army corps, *major unit of maneuver*⁽¹⁵⁾,

To the rhetorical to part, it is necessary to recognize that perhaps never the extolled possibilities of an operating instrument have been therefore clamorously refutation from the war events to short distance of time. But who, more than anyone other, had the bitterness of having to change one mind was Gen. Soddu.

14) A. PARIANI. *La dottrina. Lo spirito in Le Forze Armate dell'Italia fascista*, page 126-127.

15) U. SODDU, *L'esercito nella sua efficienza attuale*, in *Le Forze Armate dell'Italia fascista*; pag 116-117.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

Organic studies for the binary division

Campaign of Ethiopia	Summer Maneuvers in Sicily 1937	Structure 1938 (Pariani)		Structure 1940 (Soddu)
		Initial	End of 1938	
Div. Command	Div. Command.	Div. Command.	Div. Command.	Div. Command.
2 Reg. Inf. with 3 Bns. Inf. & 1 Support Bty.	2 Reg. Inf. with 3 Bns. Inf. & 1 Support Bty.	2 Reg. Inf. with 3 Bns. Inf. & 1 47/32 Support Co.	2 Reg. Inf. with 3 Bns. Inf. & 1 47/32 Support Co.	2 Reg. Inf. with 3 Bns. Inf. & 1 65/17 Support Bty.
1 "Reserve" Bn.	-	1 Assault Bn.	-	1 legion MVSN with 2 Bns and 1 Mtr cop. mtr.
1 Reg. Art. with 2 groups. of 3 Bty	1 Reg. Art. with 2 groups. of 3 Bty	1 Reg. Art. with 3 groups. of 3 Bty	1 Reg. Art. with 3 groups. of 3 Bty	1 Reg. Art. with 2 groups. of 3 Bty
-	1 Bn. Of 20 mm a.a.	1 Bn. Of 20 mm a.a.	1 Bn. Of 20 mm a.a.	1 Bn. Of 20 mm a.a.
1 Bty. Mtr.	1 Bty. Mtr.	1 Bty. Mtr. Of 81 mm with 2 Co.	1 Bty. Mtr. Of 81 mm with 2 Coy & 1 Co. of 45mm	1 Bty. Mtr. Of 81 mm with 2 Coy
-	2 Co. A/T of 47/32 mm.	3 Co. A/T of 47/32 mm.	1 Co. A/T of 47/32 mm..	2 Co. A/T of 47/32 mm.
Engineer Unit	Engineer Unit	1 Engineer Bn.	1 Engineer Bn.	1 Engineer Bn.
-	-	1 Medical Sect.	1 Medical Sect.	1 Medical Sect.
Service Unit	Service Unit	1 Service Sect	1 Service Sect	1 Service Sect
-	-	1 Motor transport Sect.	-	-
-	-	1 Light Tank Sect	-	-

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

It helps now to remember the attitude of Mussolini and Badoglio or on the *vexata quaestio*. The first one was wide to the current of the arguments - also because Gen. Ottavio Zoppi, in the meeting of 29 March 1938 in the Senate, took the clearest position criticizing in depth the idea of Pariani - and, to say true that, on first he did not manifest some enthusiasm for the innovation. But then he let to convince. Probably the decisive argument was the possibility to arrange of a conspicuous mass of divisions. "*Today all determine the force of a country from the number of the divisions that it is in a position to mobilize; it is therefore a issue of legal tender...*" had openly said Pariani to the report of 22 November 1937. Also he had added at once: "*... it is a moral issue, for which it is well to speak about divisions in place of mixed brigades*", but seemed persuaded that the increase of the divisions - does not care whether to the detriment of their consistency, place that that went that is to benefit of the slimming, after all of the "*war of rapid course*" - constituted an increment of prestige to the external eyes. Including those of the Germans. Nevertheless, just in that period (1938) Gen. Roatta, military attaché in Germany, communicated the formation of war of the Germanic infantry division: three infantry regiments, a divisional reconnaissance group, a regiment artillery with three groups of 105/25 and of 150/27, a anti tank battalion with pieces from 37, a pioneers battalion and one transmissions) for total 16,000 men approximately (of which a good 2,300 non-commissioned officers), 5,000 draft animals and 900 motor vehicles.

As far as Badoglio, also disapproving, it did not take part with the due conviction and authority. Of it he spoke with Mussolini, but without to insist. Perhaps to his behavior it was not of the all strange however excessive "respect" of the attributions, since the only issues of Armed Forces re-entered in the grip competence of respect heads of the G.S.

Even if "launched" the binary, too many were the doubts provoke from the unquestionably excessive reduction of the infantries and Soddu, name undersecretary for War on 3 November 1939 in substitution of Pariani, became inspirer and craftsman of the 1940 ordering, with which the binary division acquired definitive appearance, coming to comprise also one legion of the M.V.S.N., with two cc.nn. battalions and one field machine-gun company of 1,300 men.

Therefore it was reached the thresholds of the war of Greece.

To this point a person had a afterthought: Visconti Prasca. When, on 13 August 1940, was lead from Ciano to the presence

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

of Mussolini, meeting with Jacomoni, the commander of the Troops of Albania, according to what he reported, seeing to that, considering the necessity of the strengthening of its Corp,

"... rather than to send, at the earliest time, some division to reinforce Albania would have been opportune to send a sure number of battalions to organic reinforce those already the existing carrying them to that numerical force and that tactical efficiency (of 9 or better 12 battalions) that did not have unfortunate binary"⁽¹⁶⁾.

Reason is not had to doubt that the proposal has been effectively made, however astonishes that Visconti Prasca has not thought opportune to advance it also and to the S.M.R.E above all in official form, speeding up then the support of Mussolini. However the thing had not followed from any side. The failure of the initial offensive and delineating itself of a painful withdraw opened the eyes to all. That the main responsible took at once the distances from the binary arouses little wonder. On 10 November wrote Badoglio in the daily history of the Comando Supremo:

"The Duce has made an announcement of his understanding to carry to 9 Bns. all the divisions located in Albania; since the failure of the binary division is confirmed"

and on 15 November Armellini annotated:

[Mussolini] has then spoken to me, indignant and amazed, of the fact that the *Julia* division in Albania was constituted with 6 Bns. "*Not six, duce - I have answered - but five battalions. On six battalions all the divisions are constituted [of infantry] of the army*". "*I did not know - he replied - I have always thought the divisions on ten Bns. (...)*". Because of that meeting he has given the order to constitute the thirds regiments (approximately 70) and impossibility to do in the present situation I answered: "*with the military Supply service*" and "I have given order to Starace "⁽¹⁷⁾.

Perhaps personal liabilities to Mussolini are difficult to attribute, even if sure the binary would not have never seen the light without his approval; in any case it now demonstrates of wanting to return to the old system, while emerges unexpected from a conversation and inexplicable inertia from part of the military leaders. No doubt that was impossible to constitute other 70 regiments of infantry, but because not to seize the moment the occasion in order to dissolve a sure binary number? Worse still,

16) S. VISCONTI PRASCA, op. cit., pag. 33.

17) Q. ARMELLINI, op. cit., pag. 152.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

no opposition seems is risen against the solution to supply with the cc.nn., is worth to say confirming the substitution of a regiment of infantry with a legion of the M.V.S.N., of which the negative characteristics as combatant unit were obvious⁽¹⁸⁾. And that the principle has been received without resistance the results from the daily history of the Comando Supremo in 26 date November:

a) The Duce (f. 15784 - all. 870) it gives the following directives for the rearrangement of the metropolitan army ":

...

- to form the divisions of Inf. with 9 Bn. (2 cc.nn., one mortars)

...

b) Mar. Badoglio communicated (f. 4155 - all. 875) to the G.S. of the Army that, he agreed totally with that represented with memorandum 292 (all. 281), has made to the Duce the contained proposals in it (see. exactly all. 687); of the dispositions of the Duce are continuations which all. 870...".

We not only are of faced to the confirmation of the binary division, but it seems quite that its integral realization constitutes the solution *ad hoc*. That, then, the 81 mm. mortar battalion could be considered the ninth battalion of infantry is what leaves me simply dumbfounded. He is not given to know some to understand in order what reason the binary, just now, in the moment of the largely repudiated from part of Mussolini, it has been accepted and made to revive from Mussolini. As far as Soddu, from his confidential letters to Col. Sorice would seem nearly that the "*trouble of the binary*" has been an awful gift of his predecessor or the fate. However another point of greater interest is. On 28 December wrote: "(...) *I will propose as soon as that, without to sending a new major unit, send a third regiment for my divisions*". He was not in conditions for formulating proposed because turned up the exoneration, but it is strange that only after nearly two months of bitterness, of gasping search of a barrier to oppose to the chasing Greeks, he has had the thought to return to the ternary ordering, with or without the cc.nn. legion. Fear defeat in front of Mussolini?

Replacing Cavallero and still has reason to remain perplexed. On 8 Decembers Guzzoni had returned to Rome the undersecretary and the head ordering office and mobilization of the S.M.R.E., Gen. Cappa:

16) The issue is from putting in relation to the fact that, for the organic how much the definitive previewed a legion of M. V.S.N., nearly all the divisions were still unproved. To part that, cannot be said - at least from how much it turns out - that the subject has been dealt with clarity with Mussolini.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

"Cavallero:... the divisions that leave are they binary or ternary?

I would prefer ternary.

Guzzoni: We want some to make with the valley battalions.

Cappa: A lot has equal armament.

Guzzoni: the *Julia* is ternary, the *Cuneense* goes with six Bns.

Cavallero: The *Tridentina* is in crisis. If it had a battalion more it would be in place"⁽¹⁹⁾.

And the subject fell. After the command assumption, Cavallero had field to find the structural deficiencies of the elementary G.U.. In his diary one short comment is read: "*The Division binary: it does not go. Beyond to the many disadvantages there is also what a general does not exist vice-commander. Temporarily we will assign to the C.A. some general...*" (16 January); "*For the ternary division anything in place could be made. He continues, otherwise lacks for the combat means*" (7 February); "*Division ternary: Brennero with the 18th infantry and Cuneo with the 17th infantry*" (10 February); nevertheless, inexplicably, they do not turn out completed concrete steps for a review of organic character. Also from the bottom they left, more and more insistent, the demands to return to the old ordering. The fastest wear & tear of the division had carried to dramatic situations that could not be ignored or be underrated. The commander of an infantry regiment wrote in his own diary:

"1 December - the regiment is in operations from 28 October c.a.. For combats supported in 34 days, because of the dead, hurt and missing, the organic ones are very reduced that the I and the III Bn. has to fuse into one. The arms are for the greater part inefficient and many lost, while the means of connection are not in conditions for being more take advantage of (...).

4 December- The front occupied from the regiment approximately 11 km without some means of connection: I do not have r.t. stations, I do not have telephones. I will not be able to direct an eventual action against the enemy. The connection happens to average patrols. Task: protect the withdraw of the advance units.

5 December -(...) Passes to my dependencies the 47th infantry composed of 350 men. Draft of men without originations, automatic arms (...)" ⁽²⁰⁾.

And the case was not, unfortunately, the exception. To mid January Gen. Rossi made the point to the situation, signaling the usury, the fatigue, the need to reorder of too many units. All had fields

19) Cavallero diary.

20) Daily history of the 48th *Ferrara* infantry.

disproportionate to the effectives. Second formations, second groups were lacking therefore and even support that they gave sufficient guarantees of front to eventualities not impossible to take place themselves. "*They are convinced* - specified Rossi - *that to this state of things is not a surprise to puts into effect the constitution of the division.*

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

This - therefore as it is - represents a mechanism that worn out and is gets exhausted too much soon. I express the opinion that is necessary to give again to the division the ternary constitution (with vice-commander) that - beyond to obvious advantages in the operating field - it allows to alternate the regiments online. Therefore, more than the shipment from Italy of complete divisions (that then they are not and, for a complex of reasons, they do not succeed to be completed) I think the arrival of single regiments, complete convenient or also without baggage train, in the being necessary measure in order to carry the divisions to the ternary constitution ".

For his part, Gen. Bancale, returned to Italy after to have left the commander of the VIII Corps to Gen. Gambarà, introduced a memorandum to the ministry of the War - that it forwarded to the Comando Supremo and the S.M.R.E. - on the experiences obtained from the first three months of war and on the subject expressed without ambiguity: *"the necessity is recognized to return to the ternary division"*. Well, the idea to modify the much disapproved ordering does not turn out has been not taken in consideration and the binary reigned for all the duration of the Second World War.

3. THE EFFICIENCY OF THE MAJOR UNITS MOBILIZED.

The subject of the efficiency of mobilized major unit must be examined under two profiles: of their preparation and their feeding in personnel and means. Premised that the remarks made from the commanders of Albania to the ministry of the War and the S.M.R.E. were heavy, for their natural desire of being able to employ at once the divisions of new in flow and for the bitter disappointment of having to state defects of amalgam and training (beyond to the famous disadvantages of the transport for shares), and that for against the Central Authorities, of front to the pressing demands for it reinforcements and to the fixed orders of Mussolini, it was induced to hurry to send the units just as soon as prepared, is it necessary to say that given the circumstances perhaps had more justification the Central Authorities. The period of training could be completed in Italy or Albania. Every solution introduced advantages and disadvantages. In Albania the proximity of the war would have

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

psychologically churn in the sense to accelerate the cohesion of the units mobilized, concurred the use of old instructors of experience, reassured the armies for the same fact that, *extreme ratio*, with these units in training at least a control always could be realized; for converged the Comando Superiore be able to the beginning of not to offer barracks for the men that less, not to mention officials or non-commissioned officers to the poor regiments online. In Italy the logistic problem would have been resolved, that training one much less, that psychological one of the directed breaking in the mud of Albania for nothing. Also recognizing that until January the Comando Superiore a such operating situation was found on the arms to absorb it completely, one is tilts to prefer, in the dilemma, the disadvantages connected with the training in Albania. Cavallero, after a month's command, sent a memorandum to Guzzoni with numerous critical observations in matter. Guzzoni "turned" the letter to Roatta, which it answered point for point. In short, it could not be spoken, at least on the map, of hurried constitution of the units because all had had between the warning, or the order of completion, and the departure a lasso of time variable from 22 to 40 days, very advanced, that is, to previewed how much in the plans of mobilization and assembled for a war to the land frontiers: "*Sure - Roatta wrote - it would have been much better to begin the war with major unit trained and brought together that they were had at the end of September, but that has not been possible being the demobilizing ordered in the October, of which the vicissitudes are well noted, and that it had brought serious prejudgment to the total war efficiency of the same G. U.*". The training deficiencies were known: they drew their origin from a complex of going back causes to the years of the post-war period, on which was excelling the organization totally inadequate. "*This cause is not eliminable - Roatta still added - and sure will make to feel the effects of its serious effects during all the war*".

To part the numerical issue of the effective officials and the non-commissioned officers in continuous career, in the spring of 1940 the mobilization had been established to 75% of the war personnel in order to adapt the efficiency of the units to the availability of means, draft animals, materials, etc. - criterion that for the truth is difficult to share, the much healthiest one appearing the opposite principle exactly - with the exception of the mountain troops, the Guard to the frontier and the army of the Po, for which the level came carried to 100%. Since every unit was constituted from the force to the crews (classes 1920-1919-1918-1917) and completed from shares of each of the recalled classes, with the

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

mobilization to 75% remained at home, for every class of previewed callback, 25% and a reserve of 20%, a reserve much more opportune in the cases of call not for manifesto but with call-up notices. After the freezing of October 1940, manifested the necessity of remobilization, it was introduced at once the serious dilemma. They could be recalls the men in dismissal 15 days before and this would have been the more convenient solution from the military point of view, even if they were not from underrating the most serious disadvantages of social order and psychological that it would have provoked, since unavoidably would have taken to foot the distrust in the comparisons of the Chiefs and of the central Authority. The alternative was to recall the shares not touched in 1940 (previewed 25 % and foretold 20%), but they evidently were less instructed. The choice fell on the second solution. It does not have to forget, that at the moment of the decision, the development then assumed from the operations in Albania was not previewed and that for the completion of the first divisions it had been made rerun to equalizations of men the arms (classes 1915 and younger), provision decidedly negative but imposed from the circumstances. Subsequently the way was given to the callbacks, but the G.U. did not have more, could some have it, an adequate period of training and amalgam before the departure, being the more and more pressing demands from the Comando Superiore Albania.

In the second half of November, upon request of the S.M.R.E., the ministry of the War only authorized the callback of the dismissed personnel of recent and therefore instructed, but "*after to only have used completely all the personnel shares that had not ever been recalled for emergency 1939-1940*". The authorization to remobilization the units on the base of the enforced dispositions without some risen tie of came granted from the ministry, still on insistence, of the S.M.R.E., at year-end. The contemporary and successive critic was acrid on purpose of the adopted decision, however it can reasonably be admitted that less violent would not have been where the preference had fallen on the callback of the soldiers as soon as just placed in dismissal. These, in synthesis, the causes of contingent character to the base of the deficiencies found in the compactness and the ability to the units. All, in short, it also went back to the demobilization of the army, that it debilitated an organism which, between numerous and not light difficulties, had laboriously reached a satisfactory degree of collective efficiency. To specify, moreover, that *never* were recalled uninstructed men at all, that is without some military service, because such

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

contingent instructed was not subject to callback without a levy estimate.

But to the contingent causes if they overlapped some others very more general and fundamental, that they were the true one, before determining of the absolute insufficiency of the training of all the contingent of levy.

First of all the detention. This was, until 1936, respectively of 18, 12, 6 and 3 months. The soldiers held to the detention of 3 months were only called to date from 1936, with the detention adoption of the only one, which but was not sufficient to make to carry out an only period of service for all, being dismisses in advance (budgetary requirements) the soldiers in determined family conditions. The detention of 18 months, then, was always a poetic, in the practical performance, in how much from 1933 in then they came searched and obtained economies budgetary postponing the call of the class levy and anticipating the discharging of the old class, and so the summery fields even were reduced in order to make to begin discharging on 20 August. The sparsely of the balanced force (come down to 205,000 men approximately) made yes that as soon as dismissed the old class, the class remained to the arms in the winter period was hardly sufficient for the garrison and barracks services; therefore detention the truly useful one to the trained ends was reduced practically to 3-4 months for every class. The callbacks for instructions happened in the years previous to the war - and contents, for requirements always budgetary, in narrow limits - more than other had been oriented to the completion of the G.U. engaged in the great practices, sure not - the more suitable to favor the training of the smaller units, the truly fundamental ones to the ends of the combat.

In all this complex of elements denied there was, moreover, to put in relief one taken place favorable circumstance in the Albanian emergency. Of principle an infantry regiment, a lot in order to consider the arm that more needs than training and of cohesion, was mobilized with average of eight - nine classes, comprised those to the arms; so in the spring of 1940 they were to the arms 4 classes of levies (1920-1919-1918-1917), to which was added 1916, recalled after little months from the dismissal. Moreover 1915 had been also it in great part recalled during spring 1940 and never totally dismissed. Consequently, near the regiments a strong number of men in service existed for a long time. In fact, the mountain divisions and the first divisions of infantry sent to Albania (*Modena, Taro, Acqui*), that they came put to point with equalization, had a highest percentage (from 80 to 97%) of staff of classes 1920-19-18-17-16-15,

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

to the arms from 6 to 30 months, while the others, completed with callbacks, had to the about 50% of the personnel of said classes, also always remarkable percentage.

The problem of the cadres was in the end too well known. To the eve of the Ethiopian campaign the ministry had arranged the reduction of the cadres on active duty permanent, the division of the roles (command and mobilization) with consequent repercussions of moral order and the contraction of the recruitment through the Military Academies, all as a result of the decision of Pariani to nearly make more and more and exclusively assignment on the complement officers. In October 1939 they only came granted increases of organic in the cadres in s.p.e., but such increases could not have repercussions that to long expiration, while the transfer in s.p.e. of a strong contingent of complement officers it did not carry to some real qualitative improvement, because it was be a matter of optimal personnel already used for the mobilization.

Finally the armament. In the last years had been adopted new arms (mtr. Breda 37, mortars from 45 and 81, guns from 47/32, machine-gunner from 20), distributed widely only in the years 1939-1940, with the equipments not still complete, at least for someone of them. Evidently nearly all the men in dismissal, not recalled in 1940, ignored foretold material new constituent the main armament of the infantry. In purpose it can be observed that such armament was absolutely online with that one which they had – at the time - the main armies. Some arm lacked, in particular the sub machine gun and the mortar from 45, but it does not have to believe that the grass of the neighbor was all the most green. The true aspects denied were others. First of all, the Italian industry did not introduce new types in the course of the war, elsewhere while a continuous search of improvement and modernization existed; in the second place the cadres (including those in s.p.e.) they were not well trained to the technical and tactical employment of the unit arms; finally, paradoxically, the new material in a sure sense harm on the psychological plan: it was thought of being "to place" and was large error. For recorded, it has been often cited, to demonstration of the insufficiency of our armament, the '91 rifle, but outside place: nearly the totality of the mobilized divisions were quickly was equipped of the modified model and, however, the part of the gun was by now of all the secondary; if it never is from disapproval, and lively, the lacked adoption flyweight automatic rifle for an share of the infantry. Naturally the discourse changes in substantial way

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

in fact of medium tanks and artilleries, fielded in which our inferiority was decisive.

Unfortunately by now the dice was drawn and it did not remain that to try to make the possible in the best possible way (that, for objectivity, it not always happened). The conviction that in the great decisions the responsibility cannot be thought limited to a single person, also in the conditions remains firm for imposing just to want political. The circumstances were sure not happy, the situation of the army did not give to substantial hopes of a straightening of the military instrument during the conflict, nevertheless between little they would have been announced the declarations of war to the Soviet Union and the United States!

As far as the feeding of the units, that is to the issue of the complements, the argument, taken generically in consideration from the S.M.R.E. since the beginning, become concrete just as soon as comprised that *of the occupation of the Epirus* it was not be a matter but of the war with resolved Greece and with two various orders of measures: rifle battalions (that is organic) with organization and complete equipments, assigned to integrally replace battalions dissolved for war causes, and battalions complements, of varied force, for the infusion of new life of the worn away units; these last ones initially were sent to Albania without unit equipments. To the date of 12 December they had been altogether prepared 32 battalions and 9 batteries (see. particular in the following pages):

- 7 rifle Bns., of which 3 departed between 6 and 9 December;
- 25 Bn. complements, of which 6 departed between 7 and 12 December;
- 2 companies light tanks;
- 9 batteries complements.

The organic battalions resource appeared on the better paper, but to the conditions that were be a matter already of units trained, various the disadvantages became showier. Cavallero had soon occasion to find them:

"The organic battalion prepared from the 48th infantry dep. for the 50th infantry, reached in these days, is constituted from coming from elements from various centers, not still well-educated and for null it brings together. The commander of the Bn. - in expectation for reduction of cadres - he had not ever commanded the corresponding unit. The commanders of companies are official recalled, old of age and delicate health. The greater part of the troop does not know the Breda machine-gun, nor the mortar from 45, nor has never made the launch of a hand grenade.

The commander of the Bn., to the action of the presentation, has declared is ready, as soldier, to every sacrifice, but that his unit has absolutely need of a period in order to amalgamate itself, to instruct itself, to be become familiar with.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

The situation of rifle battalions and unit complements prepared for Albania, to
the date of 12 December 1940-XIX

Preparation in territory		Destination in Albania			Effectives introduced until 12 December 1940- XIX
Unit prepared	Depot or regt. of preparation	G.U.	Regiments	Port or airport of disembarkation	
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 83 rd Inf.	Inf. Div. "Venezia"	84 th infantry regt.	Durazzo (Tirana)	
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 84 th Inf.				
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 19 th a.		19 th artillery regt		
1 Bn. fucil.	35 th infantry	Inf. Div. "Ferrara"	47 th Inf. (I/47)	Valona	Left 9/12 via sea
1 Bn. fucil.	12 th infantry		47 th Inf. (II/47)		Left 9/12 via sea
1 Bn. fucil.	36 th infantry		48 th Inf. (I/48)		Left 9/12 via sea
1 Bn. fucil.	Dep. 48 th Inf.		48 th Inf. (II/48)		Left 8/12 via sea
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 39 th Inf.		48 th regt. infantry		
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 225 th Inf.	Inf. Div. "Arezzo"	225 th rgt. infantry	Durazzo (Tirana)	
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 226 th Inf.		226 th rgt. infantry		
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 48 th a.		53 rd rgt. artillery		
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 31 st Inf.	Inf. Div. "Siena"	31 st rgt. infantry	Valona	
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 10 th a.		10 th rgt. artillery		
1 Bn. fucil.	Dep. 47 th Inf. (1)	Inf. Div. "Parma"	49 th Inf. (I/49)	Durazzo (Tirana)	
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 47 th Inf.		49 th infantry		Left 7/12 via sea
1 Bn. fucil.	Dep. 19 th Inf. (1)		50 th Inf. (I/50)		
1 Bn. fucil.	Dep. 48 th Inf.		50 th rgt. infantry		
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 50 th Inf.		50 th Inf. (II/50)		Left 7/12 via sea
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 49 th a.		49 th rgt. artillery		

(1) The allocation to other division was imposed from the necessity of to send to the "Ferrara" ready battalions with precedence.

The Greek Campaign

Chapter 14

Preparation in territory		Destination in Albania			Effectives introduced until 12 December 1940- XIX
Unit prepared	Depot or regt. of preparation	G.U.	Regiments	Port or airport of disembarkation	
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 3 rd Inf.	Inf. Div. "Piemonte"	3 rd regt. infantry	Durazzo (Tirana)	
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 4 th Inf.		4 th regt. infantry		
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 24 th a.		24 th regt. artillery		
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 48 th Inf.	Inf. Div. "Bari"	139 th regt. infantry	Berat	
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 47 th Inf.		140 th regt. infantry		
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 15 th Inf.		139 th regt. infantry		
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 16 th Inf.		140 th regt. infantry		
1 Bn. comp.	Dep. 14 th a.		47 th regt. artillery		
2 Bn. comp. alp.	C.do D. alp. "Cuneense"	Div. alp. "Julia"	8 th regt. alpine	Berat	1 Bn. left 12/12 via air.
2 Bn. comp. alp.	C.do art. D. alp. "Cuneense"		9 th regt. alpine		
1 Bn. comp. alp.	Mag. mob. btg. Morbegno		3 rd art. alp.		
1 Bn. comp. alp.	Mag. mob. Bn. Vestone	D. alp. "Tridentina"	5 th regt. alpine	Durazzo (Tirana)	
1 Bn. comp. alp.	Mag. mob. gr. alp. Bergamo		6 th regt. alpine		Left the 12/12 via air
1 Bn. comp. alp.	Mag. mob. gr. alp. Bergamo		2 nd art. alpine		
1 Bn. comp. alp.	Mag. mob. btg. alp. Intra	Div. alp. "Pusteria"		Valona	
2 cop. tank "L"	Dep. 31 ^o Inf. Tk.	Div Arm. "Centauro" –	31 st Inf. tank	Valona Durazzo (Tirana)	
1 Bn. comp. bers.	Dep. 5 th bers.		5 th regt. bersaglieres		
1 Bn. comp. bers.	Dep. 1 st bers.		1 st regt. bersaglieres		Left 11/12 via airplane
1 Bn. comp. bers.	Dep. 2 nd bers.	-	2 nd regt. bersaglieres	Valona Durazzo (Tirana)	
1 Bn. comp. bers.	Dep. 4 th bers.	-	4 th regt. bersaglieres		
1 btr.comp.a.di C.A.	Dep. 10 th a C.A.	-	26 th raggr. to C.A.		

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

How much above marks it, drawing the attention of that G.S. on the necessity that these organic units are really units of ready employment, for quickly being able to give new life to the units already hardly tried and to give again to they a degree of indispensable efficiency because they can still usefully be employed".

In order to face the requirements of the cadets complement it came made resorted, of time to time, to the callback individual. It stated results little shining, and however unavoidable for who from years and the shine was far away from the army and to the unexpected it found projected from the civil life to the atmosphere of war with large responsibilities of men, in February 1941 the S.M.R.E. arranged the effectuation of monthly course to strong practical character for complement officers to send to Albania. To every course held at the central Schools of Civitavecchia, had to participate to 50 Lieut. colonels or Major and 100 captains of the various arms. To the end of the training cycle these were send to disposition of the Comando Superiore overseas. Unfortunately the measure was late because the first course had place in March of 1941.

In total the added system adopted for the supply of personnel said not good fruits since, instead of being based on the automatism, stretched to fulfill demanded formulated of time to time and not always tidily. If it were favorable that the new divisions completed their amalgam in Albania, quite necessary appeared the availability of the battalions complements in the rears for feeding the regiments, to collect the veterans from the places of care, to instruct and to discipline the retired personnel. The first of February the Comando Superiore decided the constitution of the 9th and 11th regiment of march, one per army. It was dealt with, very modestly, of unit understandings to frame the personnel in transit. Every regiment had a battalion per army corps, on many companies how many was the divisions of the body; in its turn each company was ordered on 3-4 platoons, one for every the remaining regiment of infantry and one or two for units of the division. The organization would have had need of something much more complex and complete, of the order of a battalion for regiment of infantry, inasmuch as the weekly losses of this corresponded to the about to the effectives of a battalion. Having nothing to do with the technical side of the issue, much weight was not given to the psychological and moral aspect: the lack of replacements was deficiency that the soldier could not ever justify some to comprise, in a country that it had in force in its roles million of men. And

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

the ascertainment deserves also prominence that much too late was recognized the convenience of having a sure number of senior officials at the disposition, so as to be able to overwhelm with immediacy of the losses taken place between the battalion and regiment commanders and to concur with as much rapidity the substitution of the unsuitable for character, ability or health.

It must admit that the crucial node of the disadvantages was the lack of training in depth. Reasons of detention and balanced force - sure important - to part, the training system of the Italian army did not resist to the test of the fire: it remained behind the times and it turns out were almost bankrupt. It is bitter to assert, but it is the raw and simple truth. All the commanders, indifferently, convene on such defect and of it they spoke openly, without average measures, trying of put in some way repair. It is not a lot to the tactical regulation of the age that can be moved notes, as far as the method and systematically lack, elements still more perhaps denied of the annoying of cadets instructors and fields of training. The first step, that one of the individual training and of patrol, it was totally inconsistent: the soldier, or better the soldier in kind, was not accustomed to the gymnastic exercise - sport, was lacking in that confidence in the own physical means that derives from the training to the personal fight, to the hand to hand; road in combat atmosphere was not accustomed to the outside march. The commanders of the smaller units then, were lacking in initiative, found difficulty in the exercise of the command in order to resolve a small tactical problem: *"The inability to maneuver of the smaller units - Geloso observed -, nearly general phenomenon, a lot that very rarely has found a commander that he has known to coordinate movement and fire, has not been only caused from deficiency of physical training and individual training. Intentional having to make of the maneuver something lofty, too much classified the G. U. of advanced bore, has put the leads to very many and it has ended with the possession "the blocks" from the division on down"*⁽²¹⁾. The counter-offensive in Deshnicas valley said wide and painful demonstration of "not knowing" as behaving, as to employ the arms at their disposal.

21) The cited Geloso relation. To notice that the conduct of the combat for the commanders of platoon and squad (normally these last simple ones graduates rather than non-commissioned officers), was not facilitated from the organic: rifle platoon with two squads, each of which with 18 men with 2 machineguns. The employment of the guns machine constituted a very difficult problem that was proposed to only leave of one the squads (but constituting a third squad).

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

To the lengthening of the shooting of our artillery and to the first reaction of the fire of the enemy, the infantry, in place to articulate themselves, to continue, to take advantage of all the unit arms amassed and... it endured, also for engendering itself of a most dangerous psychosis: the mentality of the ineluctable, the impotence, the collective giving up.

Aggressive, tenacious, audacious, strength of the own ideal reasons, not sure rich of means more than us, the Greek soldier prevailed himself very soon to our esteem, than unfortunately sometimes transferred also into fear. As already he has put himself in evidence, our adversary very rarely carried out true and own actions in great style - except the period of our withdraw, during which the ability to maneuver lacked the necessary in order to infiltrate itself, to turn, to spread - demonstrated some to know to draw advantage from particular favorable situations. Nearly always limited to their own activity to a continuous succession, in the time and the space, of contemporary and partial attacks on fronts not excessive wide; he never spread rapidly across unavoidable collapse nor recourse some to encircling in tactical field, also being present often the possibility. The Greek actions of usual characterized from modest participation of artillery and wide mortar employment Stokes Brandt, rare interdiction shooting, attend the aerial bombing. After a sure period of annihilator fire the supported infantries maneuver to the attack from new fire of support in depth. They found our lines upset, with little defending survivors; they continued in the scope to occupy one determined position and of endured strengthening, without never to take advantage of the success achieved, that that concurred with us to contain every turns the breakthrough threat. Of forefront to this tactics it would have been wide sufficient to decide of trained troops and well framed. Instead ours was had from part a static defense, passive and compliant and an uncertain and little trusting attack to succeed.

"I have by now interrogated hundreds of hurt - Gambara to his division commanders wrote - the answer: "we did not know that to make"! The official, the stronger and generous elements, converts their action of command in action of individual heroism and pays with the life their useless generous effort; the mass, which shapeless flock, search in the contact of the blow and the passivity that moral and material force that would have essentially is given, beyond that from the spirit, from the aware force of the means which it has!

And it is therefore that, in these forms of fatalistic how much vain heroism, the spirit immolates itself on the altar of the ignorance who would have to be turned to the effective and true heroism.

Leaving to go the recent and remote causes that have carried to all that.

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

From more to less, we know them all to memory by now. That that now urges, that that now needs, is to supply with every means and way so that stops very soon to this phenomenon that outcome not to call disastrous (...)"

On the problem of the efficiency of the G.U. mobilization, therefore as on that one of the supplies in kind and the inflow of new G.U. they influenced, as is known, the transports from Italy and with regard to seems opportune to indicate the such weak point of organizing. Directive central organ was the Higher Transportation Directorate of the S.M.R.E., that it had competence in fact of land communications but naturally was lacking in authority on the analogous organs of the others two Armed Forces. In the long run, therefore, it could not but made to feel the absence of a inter-forces organism in a position to planning, harmonizing all the necessities in an organic program, and to make to execute the transports with unitary vision. In loading topic - other hurting aspect, having nothing to do with the errors which had to personal initiatives or hitch or hasty preparations - one chosen of relative principle to the shipment of entire units existed: homogenous cargos or mixed cargos. The first solution –steamboats with only personnel or only draft animals or only material, in order to exemplify to great lines - obeyed to the concept to use to the maximum the possibilities of transport of the ship, but it could provoke serious disadvantages: personnel of a battalion disembarked at Valona and baggage train at Durazzo. The second one was in a position to assuring the arrival of organic units but it sometimes involved a sure waste of space. Beyond to that complications were born because of technical dispositions in vigor in rigid time of peace and much on determined safety prescription to follow; prescription that in time of war and those circumstances could be see again and be modified, at least in part. From such state of things they were born you attend frictions.

To mid December 1940 the Higher Transportation Directorate found the presence of two officers of the Intendancy Superior of Albania at the airport of Foggia with the assignment to care for the precedence of the starters and formulated objections, to which Gen. Scuero answered that until when the situation had not standardized the provisions adopted the more urgent would be remained in action for having the guarantee to receive the materials necessity with due precedence. Also Gen. Soddu took part, contesting to the Higher Transportation Directorate that the ability to absorption of the Albanian ports represented a theoretical data that in the practical one did not find of norm reply: if in fact it were true that sometimes the drainage work endured

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

hindrance for the conditions of the sea or per action of the enemy or for different causes, other times the work slowed down for defect of materials under drainage and concluded:

"I agree (...) in the sense that that General Staff compiles the organic program of the transports; but, from how much it is said in the conclusions [of the sheet in reference], I must find that the possibilities that they come me represented they are inferior to the unavoidable needs of Albania, and is exactly this impossibility to catch up the requirements that I have put in evidence in my relation of 4 December, number 1648, in which I concluded with saying that the experimental rhythm of the affluence does not allow to establish the equilibrium.

They are totally convinced that the G.S. does all the possible in order to come encounter to the necessities of Albania, but since draft to safeguard no personal interests here but the prestige of the Country, I must very put in luminosity these necessities and to ask how much is possible in order to modify one be of fact that is independent from my action of command. And such state of fact I cannot change if me they do not come any supplied means"⁽²²⁾.

But all this placed in prominence only one what: the transports overseas left to wish above all for unsatisfactory organization, the bottom issue that extended the single interested persons obviously, inasmuch as, for less from the age of the war of Abyssinia, it would have been time and way to overseas study and to improve the connections in war case, is worth to say in spite of the presence of a enemy navy and air force.

4. THE COST OF THE WAR.

Little data of general character, finally, on tribute of force, blood and value.

a) Major units employed in Albania.

In Albania at the beginning of the conflict:

XXV Army Corps Command (Gen. Rossi);

XXVI Army Corps Command (Gen. Nasci);

19th Inf. Div. *Venezia* (Gen. Bonini);

23rd Inf. Div. *Ferrara* (Gen. Zannini);

29th Inf. Div. *Piemonte* (Gen. Naldi);

49th Inf. Div. *Parma* (Gen. Grattarola, then Battisti, then Adami);

51st Inf. Div. *Siena* (Gen. Gabutti, then Perugi, then Carta);

53rd Inf. Div. *Arezzo* (Gen. Ferone);

22) DSCSFAA, f. 1814/op. dated 22.12.1940.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

3rd Alp. Div. *Julia* (Gen. Girotti);
131st Arm. Div. *Centauro* (Gen. Magli, then Pizzolato).

Arrived before 3 December 1940:

9th Army Command (Gen. Vercellino, then Pirzio Biroli);
11th Army Command (Gen. Geloso);
III Army Corps Command (Gen. Arisio);
VIII Army Corps Command (Gen. Bancale, then Gambarà);
37th Inf. Div. *Modena* (Gen. Gloria, then Trionfi, then again Gloria);
4th Inf. Div. *Bari* (Gen. Zaccone, then D'Havet, then Negro);
48th Inf. Div. *Taro* (Gen. Pedrazzoli);
101st Mot. Div. *Trieste* (Gen. Piazzoni);
2nd Alp. Div. *Tridentina* (Gen. Santovito);
5th Alp. Div. *Pusteria* (Gen. De Cia, then Esposito).

Arrived between 4 December 1940 and 31 January 1941:

IV Army Corps Command (Gen. Mercalli);
Special Army Corps Command (Gen. Messe);
2nd Inf. Div. *Sforzesca* (Gen. Allearo);
6th Inf. Div. *Cuneo* (Gen. Melotti);
7th Inf. Div. *Lupi di Toscana* (Gen. Bollea, then Reisoli Mathieu);
11th Inf. Div. *Brennero* (Gen. Berardi);
22nd Inf. Div. *Cacciatori delle Alpi* (Gen. Pivano);
24th Inf. Div. *Pineroio* (Gen. De Stefanis);
33rd Inf. Div. *Acqui* (Gen. Mariotti, then Mazzini);
58th Inf. Div. *Legnano* (Gen. Ruggero, then De Cia);
59th Inf. Div. *Cagliari* (Gen. Gianni, then Angioj);
1st Alp. Div. *Cuneense* (Gen. Ferrero, then Battisti).

Arrived between 1 February and the 23 April 1941:

XIV Army Corps Command (Gen. Vecchi);
XVII Army Corps Command (Gen. Pafundi);
18th Inf. Div. *Messina* (Gen. Zani);
32nd Inf. Div. *Marche* (Gen. Pentimalli);
36th Inf. Div. *Forlì* (Gen. Ruggero);
38th Inf. Div. *Puglie* (Gen. D'Aponte);
41st Inf. Div. *Firenze* (Gen. Negri);
56th Inf. Div. *Casale* (Gen. Navarini).

Altogether, the present force in Albania to the date of 12 April were the following:

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

	Officers		NCOs.	Troops	Draft Animals	Motor vehicles	Motorcycles
	S.P.E.	Other categories					
Italiani							
R.E	2,754	16,156	18,096	408,090	61,873	12,297	3,698
CC.NN	291	1,191	1,743	26,603	2,500	396	440
CC.RR	196	133	1,837	10,772	310	420	580
R.G.F	91	1	391	3,386	410	53	18
Total	3,302	17,481	22,067	448,851			
Italians	20.813		470,918				
Albanians							
R.E	326	44	404	6,910	227	3	2
CC.NN	5	15	46	797	-	-	-
CC.RR	57	-	293	2,128	-	-	-
R.G.F	40	-	89	564	-	-	-
Total	428	59	832	10,399			
Albanians	487		11.231		227	3	

To the totals is necessary to add to 651 officers and 12,560 non recoverable non-commissioned officers and troop in hospitals of the Intendancy in Albania.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

And an ulterior element can be useful in order to synthesize the employment of the divisions arriving in Albania after 3 December of 1940:

Division	1 st Day of disembarkation	In flow into the zone of employment of the bulk		First day of Combat
		First Day	Last Day	
Acqui	13 Dec	18 Dec	25 Dec	19 Dec
Cuneense	14 Dec	17 Dec	4 Jan	18 Dec
Cuneo	22 Dec	27 Dec	10 Jan	28 Dec
Brennero	24 Dec	30 Dec	8 Jan	31 Dec
Lupi	31 Dec	5 Jan	12 Jan	10 Jan
Legnano	5 Jan	23 Jan	30 Jan	25 Jan
Pinerolo	11 Jan	13 Jan	25 Jan	23 Jan
Cacciatori	14 Jan	17 Jan	5 Feb	24 Jan
Cagliari	27 Jan	2 Feb	9 Feb	13 Feb
Sforzesca	27 Jan	28 Jan	13 Feb	13 Feb
Forlì	3 Feb	7 Feb	3 March	20 Feb
Puglie	15 Feb	16 Feb	10 March	7 March
Casale	15 March	16 March	3 April	14 April
Firenze	22 March	22 March	3 April	9 April
Messina	3 April	3 April	12 April	10 April
Marche	8 April	9 April	19 April	-

b) *Losses endured during the campaign, including the Yugoslavian front:*

	died	wounded	missing	total
11 th army				
IV army corps:				
D.f. <i>Cacciatori</i>	366	1,769	610	2,745
D. alp. <i>Pusteria</i>	392	1,532	610	2,534
supports	207	689	302	1,198
VIII army corps:				
D.f. <i>Bari</i>	985	3,608	682	5,275
D.f. <i>Cagliari</i>	484	1,303	110	1,897
D.f. <i>Pinerolo</i>	677	3,058	682	4,417
D.f. <i>Siena</i>	519	1,857	1,729	4,104
supports	181	968	85	1,234
XXV army corps:				
D.f. <i>Brennero</i>	137	662	72	871
D.f. <i>Casale</i>	81	367	8	456

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

	died	wounded	Missing	total
D.f. <i>Ferrara</i>	522	2,450	2,809	5,781
D.f. <i>Legnano</i>	195	1,452	507	2,154
D.f. <i>Lupi</i>	408	2,026	1,099	3,533
D.f. <i>Modena</i>	577	1,176	1,043	2,796
D.f. <i>Sforzesca</i>	533	2,143	1,154	3,830
D. alp. <i>Julia</i>	990	4000	2,764	7,754
rgpt. Galbiati	54	511	549	1,114
supporti	1,052	3,674	612	5,338
special army corps:				
D.f. <i>Acqui</i>	314	1,380	401	2,095
D.f. <i>Cuneo</i>	323	337	26	686
D. alp. speciale	57	108	38	203
supporti	372	1,000	433	1,805
supporti d'armata	540	1,582	644	2,766
9 th Army				
III army corps:				
D.f. <i>Venezia</i>	379	1,575	659	2,613
D.f. <i>Arezzo</i>	272	1,131	447	1,850
D.f. <i>Taro</i>	190	653	489	1,332
D.f. <i>Forlì</i>	99	341	1	441
supports	81	192	4	277
XXVI army corps:				
D. alp. <i>Cuneense</i>	157	563	152	872
D. alp. <i>Tridentina</i>	398	850	263	1,511
D.f. <i>Parma</i>	219	810	769	1,798
D.f. <i>Piemonte</i>	121	575	438	1,134
supports	131	625	159	915
XIV army corps:				
D.f. <i>Firenze</i>	25	125	3	153
D.f. <i>Puglie</i>	131	788	345	1,264
XVII army corps:				
D. cor. <i>Centauro</i>	205	1,222	590	2,017
D.f. <i>Marche</i>			2	2
D.f. <i>Messina</i>	2	27	34	63

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

Calculating the services of the Intendancy and the units directly employed by the Comando Superiore, let alone the losses due to disease and freezing, reached the following general totals:

Killed 13,755

Wounded 50,874

Missing 25,067 (for the greater part fallen on the field)

Sick 52,108

Total 154,172

Between the fallen frozen 12,368 is right to remember that a good 10 colonels of 59 regiments of infantry died at the head of their units: Gianani (32nd Inf. *Siena*), Zacco (84th Inf. *Venezia*), Trizio (47th Inf. *Ferrara*), Psaro (7th Alp. *Pusteria*), Tavoni (9th Alp. *Julia*), Marca (140th Inf. *Bari*), Scalamandrè (42nd Inf. *Modena*), Mazza (127th Inf. *Florence*), Biasutti (140th Inf. *Bari*), Scognamiglio (4th bers.).

For the Greek side, according to documents of the ministry of the War consulted during the period of the occupation, the losses on the entire Albanian front would have been of 14,420 dead, 61,600 wounded and 4,253 missing. Precise data lacked on the number of frozen that it was estimated sure advanced to the 10,00. The Official figures posted indicate 13,408 died and 42,485 wounded.

c) The *gold medals for military valor* granted to combatant units:

3rd regiment *Granatieri di Sardegna e d'Albania* (Greek front, 28 October 1940 - 23 April 1941).

13th infantry regiment *Pinerolo* (Shalesit, 12 February; Kreshova 9-19 March; Ohrida and Bilishti, 8-18 April 1941)

47th infantry regiment *Ferrara* (Greek front, 28 October 1940 -23 April 1941).

48th infantry regiment *Ferrara* (Doliana, Tepeleni, Lekeli 28 October 1940 -23 April 1941).

4th regiment bersaglieres (Erseke, Korça, mount Kalaze November-December 1940; Yugoslav front 7-11 April 1941; Qafa Qarrit, Erseke, Borova, Barmash, Perati Bridge 16-22 April 1941).

5th Alpine regiment *Tridentina* (Morova, Dushar, Varr Lamit, Çuka and Ligerit, Çuka and Greves, Gur the Prer, Bregu the Math, Sqimari 14 November -30 December 1940; Papatit, Gur i Topit January-April 1941).

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

- 8th Alpine regiment *Julia* (Pindo, Mali Shendeli, Golico 28 October 1941).
- 9th Alpine regiment *Julia* (Pindo, Mali Shendeli, Golico 28 October 1940 -23 April 1941).
- 14th Artillery regiment *Ferrara* (Greek front 28 October 1940-23 April 1941).
- 3rd Mountain Artillery regiment *Julia* (Pindo, Mali Shendeli, Golico 28 October 1940 - 23 April 1941).

5. THE JUDICIAL ACTIVITY

It does not have statistical data complete with respect to the administration of the military justice during the conflict; however, holding account of the importance of such field, the elements available bring back themselves that, even if fragmentary and not organic, seem sufficient to supply a picture of enough exhausting entirety.

In the Reign of Albania military the judicial authority was the *military Court for the Unified Armed Forces*, instituted to the end of 1939 for decree emanated from the General Deputy of the Imperial King which King of Albania and subsequently modified with Deputy decree of 31 May and 15 August 1940. Said military court had characteristics and functions similar to those exercised in the Reign of Italy of the special Court for the defense of the State: It was therefore competent to judge the crimes of hostile actions towards a foreign State, intelligence with the antinational alien, some activities or of international character, political and military defeatism, etc, and the sentences that it emitted could not be appealed. From 1 January to 20 June 1940 the procedures dealt with was 42 with 60 charged, of which 32 condemned and 28 acquitted.

As a result of the application of a provision of war in the Albanian territory came instituted the *territorial military Court of Albania*, that it applied to the norms previewed for the time of war military the criminal codes. Beginning, then, from 28 October 1940 such Court relatively assumed the denomination of *territorial military Court of war* with the penal procedures for crimes subject to the military jurisdiction of war committed in the part of the Albanian territory declared in state of war.

Subsequently it was instituted the *military Courts of war of the 9th and the 11th Armies*. The first one stopped to work on 30 June 1941

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

and the competence to define the hanging procedures were devolving to the military Court of war of Albania, in Tirana. That one of the 11th Army assumed instead, beginning from July 1941, the denomination of *military Court of war of the Armed forces high command of the Armed Forces in Greece*.

In particular, on the activity of the three courts during the war period had the following dates:

a. Territorial military court of war in Albania.

From 28 October to 31 December it began 1,238 procedures concerning altogether 21 officials, 48 non-commissioned officers, 800 graduates and soldiers, 185 laborers pertaining to civil company's mobilized and 250 persons outside the Armed Forces. The greater number of charges pressed belonged to the infantry, then followed the artillery. Negligible number of soldiers of the engineers [15], the motor service [30] and of the R. Aeronautica [12]. Moreover 88 pertaining to the Financial police, 44 police officers and 27 Albanian camicie nere had charges pressed. Between the crimes they detached were desertions naturally, for the many committed in presence of the enemy; however nearly the totality of indicted was constituted by Albanians solders. The other crimes can be classified as it follows:

- 21 cases of sabotage, all related to Italians;
- 6 cases of cowardliness, also the burden of Italians;
- 63 cases of insubordination and disobedience, of which 14 reported to assimilates to solders;
- 77 cases of theft, swindle and embezzlement; - many cases of alienation of solders effects, nearly always connected to the crime of desertion;
- 8 voluntary homicides, of which 2 committed to persons outside to the Armed Forces.

- 8 cases of treason, all related to strangers to the Armed Forces.

Approximately the procedures to cargo of laborers of the mobilized companies and the persons assimilated to military, useful to specify that they concerned, in kind, on absences from work. For how much, finally, it regards the officers, always in last the two months of 1940, they were begins 21 procedures, of which 14 for Albanese and 11 for Italians. Of the remaining 25, 6 were officers captains and lieutenants or second lieutenants. In particular it was be a matter of crimes of embezzlement, abuse of authority and personal injury accidents; three

The Greek Campaign Chapter 14

procedures with five charged came begin for crimes of cowardliness and dereliction of assignment in time of war. The case more important was that one than an Albanian lieutenant who had abandoned own unit in order to go to Yugoslavia with a non-commissioned officer, a corporal and five soldiers, carrying with them the arms in equipment.

In 1941, and just in the period January - June, the number of the denunciations obviously increased: 1,387 concerning 2,337 charged, in majority it assimilates and strangers to the military service. For these last denunciations they referred, in nearly the totality, to the offenders of the various laws, to the detainment of arms and objects of equipment and military clothing; in minor number to thefts, swindles, etc. Those relative ones to assimilated and to the mobilized civilians they regarded the crimes of abandonment of the work, theft and some refusal of obedience.

The pertaining to the Armed Forces incurred for more in the crime than desertion, presence of the enemy or not. Also in this period the greater number of these procedures was the burden of the Albanian camicie nere. On a total of 513 desertions, approximately the half it was outside of the presence of the enemy, the others in presence or with passage to the enemy. Numerous also the crimes against the property, to attribute in the order to military Albanians, the infantry, the artillery and the camicie nere, with sporadic cases in the remaining bodies. In the month of May, for a crime against the property, it came pressed charges also a senior officer: a lieutenant colonel.

Relatively frequent the crimes blow (homicides and lesions), but in nearly the totality caused from accidents caused by military motor vehicles. Voluntary homicides, a few cases did not lack, committed both by Italians and by Albanians. A few numerous the crimes against the service and the discipline, moreover committed also from some officers and non-commissioned officers.

b. Military court of war of the 9th Army.

During its short activity the Court emitted 199 relative sentences to 274 charged. Of the other denunciations, some hundreds, reached the office of the Prosecuting attorney, some were filed or defined in center preliminary investigation, others transmitted - to the action of the cessation of the operation of the Court - to the competent office of the territorial military Court of war of Tirana.

On 199 sentences fifteen they were of acquittal, of which three from

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

crime of voluntary mutilation and from that one of cowardliness. Five deserters in presence of the enemy were condemned to the pain of life imprisonment; for the crime of abandonment of place in presence of the enemy seven sentences were emitted: two of acquittal, in the comparisons of two sergeants first class, and five of sentence (from 10 to 20 years of military confinement). Between the condemned a captain and a second lieutenant, both of subject and pertaining, like the others, to the infantry.

The more numerous sentences [47] came inflicted for the crime of theft, to damage of the Military administration or of military, and for self-destruction [23]. They follow 18 cases of disobedience and 13 of insubordination, all committed in the comparisons of non-commissioned officers or trooper. Finally, other sentences regarded culpable homicides, nearly always had to investments with military motor vehicles culpable damaging, voluntary lesions [6], violate handling, false [2], swindle [3], alienation of effects of military clothing, receiving, drunkenness in service [2] and not carrying out of orders [6].

c. Military court of war of the 11th Army.

To the action of the institution of such Court all the relative denunciations in course to the crimes of competence of the new judicial organ found at the Direction Legal profession of Tirana. The office of the Prosecuting attorney began just the job in the December of 1940; the first audiences carried out to mid January of 1941 at Valona.

From December 1940 to May 1941 the activity of the Court was engaged exclusively for the definition of procedures to cargo of military; in the May of the 1941 eleven denunciations in the comparisons of strangers only reached the Armed Forces. Altogether, until to when the Court was moved in Greece, the Prosecuting attorney received 1,291 denunciations, of which 102 in the comparisons of persons strangers to the military service: 2 in December 1940, 11 in May and 89 in June 1941. The relation to more numerous and more serious they were those than desertion and of self-destruction; inferiors for entity and number the procedures for crimes against the service, the discipline and against the patrimony.

The Greek Campaign
Chapter 14

In particular:

I. For desertions outside of the presence of enemy

December 1940	n.	36	
January 1941	"	59	
February 1941			" 112
March 1941	"	78	
April	"	70	
May 1941	"	149	
June 1941	"	<u>32</u>	
Total	n.	536	

II. For desertions with passage to the enemy or in presence of enemy

December 1940	n.	23	
January 1941	"	35	
February 1941	"	17	
March 1941	"	25	
April 1941	"	26	
May 1941	"	46	
June 1941	"	<u>1</u>	
Total	n.	173.	

III. Voluntary mutilations

December 1940	n.	12	
January 1941	"	92	
February 1941			" 20
March 1941	"	22	
April 1941	"	16	
May 1941	"	10	
June 1941	"	<u>4</u>	
Total	n.	176	

IV. Crimes in service

December 1940	n.	6	
January 1941	"	16	
February 1941	"	17	
March 1941	"	9	
April 1941	"	31	
May 1941	"	38	
June 1941	"	<u>3</u>	
Total	n.	120	

The Greek Campaign

Since cases of voluntary mutilations that many soldiers caused in proximity of the contact line were themselves numerous, the office of the Prosecuting attorney thought right to proceed with greater solicitude in the cases of charged. The relative preliminary investigation were rather difficult for lack than I forward of regular relationships from part of commanders of the Corps, that, located in combat zone, had not had the material possibility to carry out any preliminary inquiry. Consequently, the preliminary investigation came executed from the magistrates and from the chancellors directly in the localities where the crimes had been committed. Many debates celebrate center outside, and just near the field hospital 403 in which it was found the greater part of it charged. In the cases in which from the self-injury it was derived only a temporary incapacity lend service the Court ordered the postponement of the execution of the pain; that is in order to admonish the soldiers who committed the crime would not have given the results attended a of avoid to the risks and the hard work of the war, is in order to concur

The Greek Campaign

to the condemned the possibility of redemption by returning to the combat line.

In the January-February the commander of the 11th Army convened three extraordinary military courts of war who carried out the judgments in proximity of the combat line, in the vicinities of the bridge of Dragoti (Tepeleni), in order to judge two soldiers charged of cowardliness, of which one was condemned to the capital punishment (sentence executed) and the other to the confinement, and a third soldier who, was charged with insubordination with violence towards a superior official and homicide of two soldiers, was condemned to the capital punishment (sentence executed).

The procedures the burden of officers regarded in nearly the totality the Albanians. Eleven Albanian officers in fact were pressed charges for desertion in presence of the enemy or with passage to the enemy. For the desertion crime they came pressed charges also three Italian officers; for the two of them the commander of the 11th Army decided revoke him of the criminal action to proceed, for the third was decided the suspension of the procedure to norm of the art. 11 the R.D. 9 July 1940, n. 924. A procedure in the comparisons of a colonel for culpable non performance of the assignments receipts was defined, after a delicate a and complex instruction, with a decree of the commander of the 11th Army, with which it was not established, place to proceed because the fact debited to the official did not constitute crime, but only a disciplinary infraction.

In the 87 audiences held from the Court of the 11th Army in the period January-June 1941 were emitted 357 sentences.

The Greek Campaign

APPENDIX DOCUMENTS

- n. 1. Report of the Undersecretary for War to the XVII session of the C.S.D. - February 1940.
- n. 2. Personal letter dated 14.8.1940 of Gen. Visconti Prasca to Gen. Soddu.
- n. 3. Meeting Record held at the Venice palace on 15.10.1940.
- n. 4. Italian ultimatum to the Greek government, dated 28.10.1940.
- n. 5. Meeting Record held at the Venice palace on 10.11.1940.
- n. 6. Personal letter dated 15.11.1940, of Gen. Soddu to Col. Sorice.
- n. 7. Personal letter dated 15.11.1940, 13:00 hours, of Gen. Soddu to Col. Sorice.
- n. 8. Article of "*Il Regime Fascista*" dated 22.11.1940.
- n. 9. Apocryphal answer of Badoglio to Farinacci.

The Greek Campaign

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The Greek Campaign

Document n. 1

Secret

MINISTRY Of the WAR
Cabinet

XVII SESSION
Of the SUPREME DEFENSE COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 1940 - XVIII
Subject n. 23

ALBANIA

Report of S.E. the Undersecretary of State for the War

- I -

*Measures for the organization for the war
- up to the time of peace - of the Kingdom of Albania*

1. Introduction

The military organization of Albania does not have particular print, because is considered that region as overseas land, given the mastery that can be thought sure of the Adriatic communications in case of war.

2. Ordering

The previewed normal ordering for the troops in Albania is following:

- Comando superiore Albania troops (XXVI Army corps);
- 4 divisions;
- troops and Services of C.A.

On the Comando Superiore they depend:

- a territorial defense command with 10 districts;

The Greek Campaign

- one command Guardia alla Frontiera;
- one command R. Guardia di Finanza, one legion). There are currently in Albania 5 divisions and T. S.

And previewed in case of emergency the influx into Albania of another army corps and of a varied number of divisions, according to the several operating hypotheses.

3 Albanian Troops

With law 115 of the 13 July 1939 the Albanian Armed Forces have been fused with those of the Italians.

In relation to the yield of the Albanian classes (approximately 6,000 men), they are in Albania 6 bd. and Albanian 4 bn.. It is not previewed to form greater units with Albanian elements, but to employ them, eventually, in the framework of our units. In Italy is the Albanian royal guard rgt., in garrison in Rome.

The Albanian organs of recruitment in the 1940 will be replaced gradually with our organization (districts). It will be proceeded to the systemizing of the Albanian forces in dismissal (approximately 95.000 men).

It is in study the extension of our Unified Body of Laws on the recruitment to the Albanians, with the opportune adaptations in relation to the ordering and the uses of that State. The Albanian officers and non-commissioned officers in S.P., judged suitable, be introduced in the roles of our square; he judged not permissible are placed gradually in dismissal. Introduce approximately 600 officers and 700 non-commissioned officers will be. Albanian elements attend already our military institutes in order to become officers or non-commissioned officers. Obstacle is found, for now, in their recruitment in the lack of acquaintance of the Italian language, whose obligatory instruction in the schools in Albania will resolve the problem and will be the best source than conjunction between the two people.

Care to facilitate influx of officers and the Albanian non-commissioned officers into Italy, waves mainly to attach them to us. For the same aim it leave of the Albanian military troops to specialize lend service in Italian garrisons.

4. Air defense

It is previewed from part of the Army that one of Tirana and the oil concession of Devoli: to the ports of Valona and Durazzo it is supplied by the R. Navy.

For now they have been sent a single a.a. bty. for Devoli, in relation to the availability of materials.

It is in study the system of the sight net.

The Greek Campaign

5. Works

Defensive.

The defensive systems of Albania will comprise:

- a central redoubt;
- advanced obstructions.

The central redoubt, already in existing part with the obstructions of Miloti and of Librash, it will be put in efficiency (work already begin) and extended towards the southwest covering Valona. Expense previewed approximately 100 million.

Barrack.

The Albanian barracks had a ability only 5,000 men.

They are in course of work in order to construct to all the barracks for the commands and the troops and all the buildings for the necessary services in relation to the normal ordering of which to previous number 2.

- II -

*Military interests circa the provisions
for the economic exploitation of Albania*

Since, in case of war, it is thought of being able to count on the communications through the Adriatic, convenient esteem that the two economies - Italian and Albanian - become complementary. The military interests circa the provisions for the economic *exploitation* of Albania regard a twofold order of requirements:

- a) direct: in order to satisfy the necessities of the troops located in Albania;
- b) indirect: in order to increase the independent national possibilities.

A) *Direct requirements:*

- *Commodities* - Calculating a medium force, in case of emergency in Albania, of 100,000, men and 10,000 quadrupeds, the local resources are totally insufficient to supply the necessary flour and oats; they can give, only limited quantitative, meat, straw, sugar and oil. In order to diminish the entity of the transports from Italy, he would be useful, but not indispensable, that in Albania they are developed in particular the following cultivation: grain, oats, hay, beet and were implanted an oil mill.

The institution of appropriate stations would be also opportune of mounts in order to improve the quality of the Albanian bovines, that are of smallest size (weight q. 2-2., 5) and therefore of most insufficient rendering in the slaughtering.

- *Forest resources* - They are sufficient to satisfy to the entire requirements of firewood to burn for the troops. The provisions taken from the Ministry

The Greek Campaign

of Agriculture for the increment and the protection of the Albanian forest heritage they are most useful.

- *Horses and mules* - Those that could be drawn to the requisitions (14,000 horses, 4,000 mules) would cover the requirements of horses totally and partially that one of mules.

It would be the much opportune improvement with stations of mounts of the horses and the Albanian mules, which are of small inferior quality and of stature.

- *Water resources* - and a lot felt, especially in southern Albania, the necessity of an organic exploitation of the water resources of the zone, by means of the construction of aqueducts for the civil uses, yes to assure the parking also of remarkable amounts of troops. This need particularly is felt in the zones of Valona and Berat.

- *Motor vehicles* - Given the insufficient number of motor vehicles, on which being able to make account for requisition (400 trucks, 400 motors vehicle, 100 buses), and the elevated number of them (especially of trucks, approximately 2,500) that instead it would be necessary, needs to in any case favor the increment of civil motoring in Albania.

To such aim the Ministry of the War makes use, for some military transports, of civil enterprises.

- *Fuels* - the production of Albanian oils (approximately 200 thousand tons annually) would completely cover the civil and military requirements in war case.

Today but the Albanian oils are refined at Bari. For transport economy it would be necessary that able refinery was instituted in Albania a annual production of 50,000 tons

B) *Indirect requirements*: (omitted).

- III -

Military interests via provisions for the development of the communications

A

*Land communications (railway and ordinary)
of Albania with Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and European Turkey*

1. *Railway communications*

In Albania do not exist railroads. Railroad would be better than useful on tracing in equal part to

The Greek Campaign

that one of the Roman via Egnatia. Beyond great political and economic advantages, the railroad would allow, with relative rapidity, the important employment Italian military forces, in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula, strengthening in remarkable way the threat, towards the Balkan States, of our forces located in Albania. The tracing that thought more convenient is that one:

Durazzo - Shkumbi Valley - Devoli (Gramshi) Valley - Coriza. The Durazzo outline - Shkumbi (Elbasan Valley) - Lago of Ocrida - Coriza, perhaps easier construction, would have the serious disadvantage of being too much subject to coming from the Yugoslavian border. From Coriza they would have to be detached two trunks:

- one for Florina, agreeing again (with a feature of 60 km. in Greek territory) to the Greek railroad of Salonicco and here allowing the connection with Athens and Constantinople;

- one for Ocrida, where would be connected (with one feature of km. 30 in Yugoslavian territory), to the Yugoslavian railroad to Skoplje, from where to Belgrade, Sofia, Bucharest.

The Yugoslavian railroad Ocrida - Skoplje is today at reduced gauge, but it is in plan its transformation to ordinary gauge. Esteem that the traction, given the water possibilities of Albania, could be electrical. A railway connection Durazzo- Tirana would be also opportune.

2, Land communications

The wide program of street work in Albania, organized from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, undersecretary of State for the Albanian Transactions and from the Ministry of the LL.PP., with the understanding of the Ministry of the War and in via of development, will answer, completed that it is, to the military requirements, assuring is towards Yugoslavia that towards Greece multiple lines of operations. The Corps of Engineers is supplying in particular for two roadways towards the Greek border: the ring Coriza - Dardhe - Bilishti and the Delvino - Conispoli.

They are of special and urgent military interest the following works, lists in order of importance (map included):

- a) construction of the roadway Elbasan - Gramshi - Devoli valley - Maliq, km 110), entrusted to the A.S.A. (street company Albania), yes to avoid the obliged use of the Elbasan - Progradec - Coriza, adjacent to the border Yugoslavia;

- b) Completion of the road Puka-Kukes (A.S.A.), (km. 143 altogether, of which 95 to arrange and 48 to construct);

- c) construction of the roadway Bureli-Peskopeja (km. 50) (entrusted to the Ministry of the Albanian publics works);

- d) construction of the Librash- Peskopeja (km. 84), modifying the tracing of too much puts into effect the cart track adjacent to the Yugoslavian border;

The Greek Campaign

e) construction of the roadway Alessio- Vau Dejes (km. 27), necessary flanking the Alessio-Scutari, often interrupted by flooding;

f) variance of km. 46 to the feature of the Librash-Coriza road, between Kukes and Leshnica, in order to remove it from the Yugoslavian border.

They cover also importance from the military point of view:

g) continuation of the roadway Librash-Peskopeja until Kukes (km. 50 approximately), what that would allow a roadway for line of communications along the eastern border;

h) construction of the flanking Erseke-Premeti (km. 75 approximately), waves to avoid the obliged passage for Perati bridge, adjacent to the Greek border.

On the degree of urgency and importance of the aforesaid works the Ministry of the War, (that does not have deep appropriations for street work in Albania), has interested the Ministry of the LL.PP. and the Undersecretary of State for the Albanian transactions.

The transformation in freeway of all the distance Durazzo - Tirana - Elbasan - Gramshi - Coriza would bring advantages, from the military point of view, beyond that from that politician and economic, analogous to those of the railroad Durazzo - Gramshi - Goriza, of which to the previous number.

B

Marine Communications between the Puglisi coasts (Bari - Brindisi) and Albanians (Valona - Durazzo)

The military interests regard in particular way the development of the cargo ability and drainage of the Albanian ports, arousing some worry the ability to the Italian ports of Bari and Brindisi, respect the entity of the expectable transports for Albania.

To the state puts into effect Valona and Durazzo the maximum ability to daily drainage has one altogether, in favorable conditions, of:

- 16,000 men
- 9,000 quadruped
- material 1,700 tons.

Therefore too much time (approximately 20 days) would employ the disembarkation of the units of ready employment for our eventual offensive attitude in Albania. And consequently indispensable from the military point of view the effectuation of the work of improvement of the two ports, proposals from the commission of the Ministry of the LL.PP.. Particular usefulness would have also the institution, in case carried out the Durazzo - Coriza railroad, of a railway ferry between Brindisi and Durazzo.

The Greek Campaign

C

Telecommunications electrical and radio electric

1 - The civil Albanian telegraph net is in bad conditions of breaks and isolation, and it does not answer to any constructive technical criterion. The direction of the PP.TT. of Albania has introduced in the last June to the own authorities a plan of radical renewal of the net, with a estimate of expense of 7 million francs Albanian.

Necessary esteem that the plan is put into effect, overwhelming in such a way a serious deficiency: in war case in fact the net would be placed to disposition of the military authority and could be used also for the aerial sight (organization until now lacking in Albania). In Albania telephone net of the former Albanian gendarmerie exists also, found in deplorable conditions of operation: it currently is managed from Armed forces high command CC.RR. and comes gradually improved. The r.t. communications are assured the net military radio and from the civil net Tirana - Coltano.

2 - Already the Italy - Albania telephone link was discussed in the last session of the C.S.D., currently lacking. Given to the importance, also military, of the thing, necessary esteem that the Cogefag easy, with the acquisition of the being necessary materials, the Ministry of the Communications in the performance of the planned and already financed connection with submarine cable, which would have to be completed in autumn 1940.

DELIBERATION PROPOSAL

The C.S.D.:

- action taken, agreeing, of the program of the Ministry of the War for the military organization of Albania;

- make marks so that the undersecretary of State for the Albanian Transactions, continuing in the collaboration already effectively begun with Ministry of the War, holds present the military interests is in the development of the street work is in the economic and industrial provisions in that State;

- the necessity recognizes that soon is renewed the Albanian civil telegraphic net; - the Cogefag interests so that easy the performance of the plan of the Ministry of the Communications for puts down it of the submarine cable, indispensable element for the connections between Italy and Albania.

The Greek Campaign

Document n. 2

COMANDO SUPERIORE ALBANIA TROOPS
Commander

Rome 14 August 1940 - XVIII

To his Excellenceis
General Soddu gr. cr. Ubaldo
Undersecretary of State to the War
ROME

Caro Soddu,

S.E. the minister of the Foreign countries has yesterday evening received me in presence of the etc. Benini, Jacomoni and Starace. The necessity has shown me that in the hypothesis G the military preparedness is to good and the forces in a position to acting between 15 days, beginning from today.

The necessity to proceed endured to the boarding operations turns out some obvious.

Since the alignment in course could not remain unnoticed, given especially the conditions of the powder on the Albanian roads and the uncovered land, would be necessary of being able to decide of some group of art. of C.A. in the alignment zone. I know that the a.a. artilleries are much insufficient, but is necessary in order to hurry the times of being able to act also of day without to count that we are in lunar phase of light.

I have spoken this morning with his Ecc. Marshal Badoglio. With the most affectionate devout salutes.

aff.mo Visconti Prasca

N.B. - Given the circumstances it is necessary that the Gen. Nicoletti remains more lengthily possible to the command of the defense. The operations of requisition, mobilization and the contact with the Government and the civil population demand a strengthened experience for which the arrived action of a new would be very problematic in a moment of crisis.

Secret

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD
IN THE WORKROOM OF THE DUCE
AT PALAZZO VENEZIA

ON 15 OCTOBER 1940 - XVIII – 11:00 HOURS
(stenographical report)

Present:

The Duce,

Their Excellences:

Ciano, Badoglio, Soddu, Jacomoni, Roatta, Visconti Prasca

Secretary: Lt. Col. Trombetti.

Duce (*): the scope of this - meeting is that one to define the modalities of the action - in its general character - that I have decided to begin against Greece.

This action, at first, must have objects of maritime character and territorial character.

Its objectives of territorial character must bring to us the taken of possession of all the southern Albanian coast, those that is that they must give the occupation to us of the ionic islands Zante, Cefalonia, Corfù and the conquest of Salonicco.

When we reach these objectives, we will have improved our positions in the Mediterranean, in the comparisons with the England.

In according to weather, or concomitance of these actions, the integral occupation of Greece, in order to put it outside combat and in order to assure to us that in every circumstance it will remain in our political-economic space.

Specified therefore the issue I have established also the date, that to my warning it cannot be delayed of an hour: and that is the 26th of this month.

This is an action that I have long matured from months and months; before our participation to the war and also before the beginning of the conflict

(*) Participation synthesized in the History version "Storia di un anno" by Mussolini.

The Greek Campaign

Established these essential points draft now to examine as this action will have to be carried out, and therefore I have sent to call the Deputy General and the Commander of the troops of Albania for that they make us a political and military picture so that we can determine all the suitable measures in order to reach in the best and most convenient way finish than time ours objectives.

I add that I do not see complications to the North. The Yugoslavia has all the interest to be calm, as of the rest it appears also from public declarations of the official organs that exclude the possibility of complications, but that features to defend the country.

Complications of Turkish character I exclude them, especially when Germany has been implanted in Rumania and from when Bulgaria has been strengthened. This can constitute a pawn in our game, and I will make the steps necessary for that it does not lose this only occasion for the attainment of its aspirations on the Macedonian and the outlet to the sea.

Established the objectives and the date, draft now to see the other aspects of the situation, so as to be able – on basis of them - to determine measures and means to take. (Invites the Deputy General of Albania to state how he sees the situation).

Jacomoni: In Albania this action attends anxiously. The country is impatient and full of enthusiasm; indeed they can assert that the enthusiasm is therefore alive that in these last times has had some disillusion because the action has still not been begun.

We have supplied very seriously to supplying of the country. "Port of Durazzo" exists the danger, in the sense that if it was bombed we would have of the difficulties in the refueling. The street issue has made many progresses, also without wanting to consider it as resolved.

Duce: How appears the situation of Greece is seen from Albania? This note draft of knowledge.

Jacomoni: And very difficult to specify it. The public opinion is displaying nonchalant.

We have published that had been killed the granddaughter of the famous slaughtered Albanian patriot, but have answered refuting the fact. From the news of our informers it turns out that while two months ago the Greeks did not seem inclined to a serious resistance, now they appear decided to oppose to our action. *The clandestine radio that we have placed at Argirocastro, with which we carry out one active propaganda, it is a lot listened to and us it turns out that it obtains of the effects (*)*. Creed that the Greek resistance various will be influenced according to that our action will be quick, decided and imposing or prudent and limited.

There is then from considering which aid the Greeks can receive from the English via sea

(*) Phrase omitted in "Storia di un anno".

The Greek Campaign

Duce: I exclude in the most absolute way the shipment of men; also aviation does not have force to dissuade.

Jacomoni: The only worry could derive occupying partially Greece, in that English, from the remaining bases, in the case were in a position to sending imposing aerial forces, could carry their offenses in southern Italy and Albania. The apparatuses of Greek aviation are 144, that that would not constitute a serious apprehension.

Duce: What has been the mind of the population in Greece?

Jacomoni: Appear very deeply depressed.

Ciano: there is a clean division between the population and a ruling class, political, plutocratic, that it is that one that spirit the resistance and maintains the anglophile spirit in the country alive. One is this smallest class very rich one, while the other part is indifferent to all the events, including that one of our invasion.

Jacomoni: The news has provoked much impression on the Greek population that I have made to disclose on the height of the salaries in Albania.

Duce: (Invites General Visconti Prasca to speak on the military situation).

Visconti Prasca: We have prepared an operation against Epiro, that current will be ready for the 26th and that is introduced under much favorable auspices.

The geographic situation of Epiro does not favor the possibility to the other Greek forces to take part for that from one side there is the sea and from the other an impassable alpine strip. These theaters allow to a series of turning of the Greek forces - calculated to approximately 30,000 men- which allows us the occupation of Epiro in short time: 10 or 15 days.

This operation - that it could allow us to frame all the Greek troops it has been prepared end in the minimums details and is perfect for as much as humanly possible.

The resolution of the action would carry to us to improve our positions, it would give a surer frontier to us and the possession of the port of Prevesa that could change completely our situation.

This is the first phase of our operation to lead in depth in the better way.

The action but is subordinated to the climatic conditions. Between some weeks the season of rains would provoke to series difficulty for the conquest of Epiro and the base of Prevesa.

Duce: The date of the beginning of the operations can be anticipated but not be delayed.

Visconti Prasca: The spirit of the troops is the highest, the enthusiasm is to the maximum degree. I have not ever had to complain of my troops in Albania. The only manifestation of indiscipline that I have had to find has been that one

The Greek Campaign

of officials and soldiers for excess in the anxiety of wanting to go ahead and wanting to fight.

Duce: How many forces you have?

Visconti Prasca: Approximately 70,000 men besides to the special battalions.

Regarding the troops that are at the front - approximately 30,000 men we have a superiority of two to one.

Duce: And for what it regards means: tanks, field defense of the enemy?

Visconti Prasca: The only worry is constituted from the aid that could be given to the adversary by the English aviation, given that the Greek, for me, does not exist.

As far as the front of Salonicco it must make some reserves because of the seasonal course.

It could be given run to the action in Epiro.

Duce: the action on Salonicco is important because it must prevent that it becomes a English base.

Visconti Prasca: For this action it wants a sure weather to us. The disembarkation port is Durazzo that is to be distant from Salonicco approximately 300 kilometers hurry therefore a pair of months.

Duce: However it can be prevented the English to disembark at Salonicco. It is important that also on this front two divisions are under way since it could determine the Bulgarian competition.

Visconti Prasca: Also in order to begin the march on Athens the base of all is the occupation of Epiro and the port of Prevesa.

Duce: And the occupation of the three islands: Zante, Cefalonia and Corfù.

Visconti Prasca: Sure.

Duce: These actions must be carried out at the same time. You know which is the moral of the Greek soldiers?

Visconti Prasca: It is not people who are content to fight themselves.

Duce ():* Now another thing. Fixed the given draft of knowing as we give to the appearance of the fatality of this our operation. A justification of general character is that Greece has allied of our enemies which use of its bases, etc; but then it wants the incident to us for which it can be said that we enter in order to put the order. If this incident the made to rise well, if the determined ones are not the same one.

Jacomoni ():* I can make something on the frontiers; incidents between the ciamurioti(#) and Greek authorities.

Visconti Prasca():* we have predisposed of the arms and French bombs in order to make a false attack.

Duce ():* All this has an absolutely negligible value for me;

(*) Participation omitted in "Storia di un anno".

(#) Greek minority Albanians

The Greek Campaign

it is for giving a not much smoke. However it is well if you can make so that there I seize the ignition of the fuse.

Ciano ()*: When do you want the incident to happen?

Duce ()*: the 24th.

Ciano ()*: the 24th will be the incident.

Duce ()*: Nobody will believe this misfortune, but for a justification of metaphysical character it will be able to be said that it was necessary to come to one conclusion.

What here is necessary in this kind of operations is to act with the maximum decision, because it is the secret of success, also in the comparisons of that they could be the foreigner's aids.

Now it must give this alibi so that he can himself be said: "Not there is null to make. You want to go to the aid of this people that already are struck?"

This is a speech that the Turks could make, and that also English would find convenient to follow.

Visconti Prasca: The operation has been prepared so as to give the impression of a sweeping back in a few days.

Duce: For the responsibility that I assume in this matter I say excessive YOU of whom they can not be preoccupied with the losses, also not being prompt, from the human point of view, for the life of a single soldier. I say that because to the times a firm head in consideration of the serious losses endured.

Visconti Prasca: I have ordered that the battalions always attached, also against one division.

Badoglio: The issue regards two deployments: that Greek and that of the English aid. I am with You completely in nearly sure thinking the exclusion of English invasion. They much more are taken care of the Egypt that of Greece and in the Mediterranean the troops do not willingly go on steamboats. Therefore the only aid possible would be that one of aviation.

To this forecast the corrective one could be adopted to have it coincide with the action against Greece with that one for Marsa Matruh.

In this case it is very difficult that sway of the aircrafts from Egypt in order to send them to Greece.

That can be made because for the 26th current also Graziani can be ready.

Duce ()*: I would be for an advance of some days for the Graziani action. And then the fact of the conquest of Marsa Matruh will render the possibility still more difficult than a similar aid, especially previewing that we will not stop ourselves. Lost the hinge of Egypt, even if London could be still supported, the English Empire would be starting to unravel. The Indians

(*) Participation omitted in "Storia di un anno".

The Greek Campaign

they are in an intolerance situation and English could not more receive aids from the South Africa and the thorn of the Red Sea.

I add a consideration of moral character that is and that this African success would be of push to the soldiers in Albania.

Here because I wish in the two I set in action a synchronism with a light advance on that African.

Badoglio: Examinee now the Greek problem, I assert that to stop us to only the Epiro it does not correspond to the situation. I do not exaggerate saying that we must occupy also Candia and the Morea, if we want to occupy Greece.

The operation for the Epiro studied by Visconti Prasca goes well. Given in safty the left flank, the opposing forces would not have to introduce many difficulties. We have aviation.

Duce: We will put in the operations for more or less 400 apparatuses, also in sight of what he can be the English contribution.

Badoglio: It must that we occupy all Greece if the problem wants to be profitable. For this they are necessary approximately 20 divisions while in Albania we have nine, plus one of cavalry. It is obvious that in these conditions three months are necessary (*).

Roatta: Holding account of all, we can count on the equivalent of 11 divisions. In order not to stop us at the Epiro it would have to intensify the shipment of troops. That also in order not to give the feeling that we do not have more breath in order to go ahead.

To study therefore at once the problem of the total occupation of Greece.

Duce: Established the beginning of operations the 26th current and previewed the liquidation of the Epiro towards 10-15 November, we have until that moment another month for the shipment of new troops.

Visconti Prasca: The shipment of other troops depends from what it is the development of the plan and they cannot be sent that to occupied Epiro.

Not draft of a sweeping action in the time, but of an action of safety. In this season it cannot be operated that in southern Greece.

Maintaining Durazzo as a base in order to go to Salonicco, it wants a month of time to us for the shipment of each division.

Duce: In order to clear the concepts that we are exposing, I ask as it comes seen the march on Athens, after to have occupied the Epiro.

Visconti Prasca: I do not see it with many difficulties. A group of 5 or 6 divisions would be sufficient.

Badoglio: I would think more urgent the march on Athens that on Salonicco, also because English disembarkation at Salonicco does not seem probable.

Ciano: Much more in consideration than a Bulgarian participation.

Roatta: Pressure also from that part wants one to us.

Duce: You think that two divisions are sufficient?

(*) the two last periods are omitted in "Storia di un anno".

The Greek Campaign

Roatta: Yes.

Duce: Now it seems to me that the ideas are gone specifying: operation in the Epiro - Salonicco - observation of what it can succeed because of the Bulgarian participation that I think probable. I agree totally for the occupation of Athens.

Visconti Prasca: Then from Athens we – after all - cut Greece, and to Salonicco we can do departing from the capital.

Duce: From the marginal point of the occupation of the Epiro until to Athens that distance elapses?

Visconti Prasca: 250 kilometers with one mediocre street net.

Duce: And the land is what?

Visconti Prasca: High hills, sour, bare.

Duce: And the directions of the valleys?

Visconti Prasca: East-West, therefore just in direction of Athens.

Duce: This is important.

Roatta: That is true until to a sure point because geographic map of the zone must cross a chain of 2000 meters of height (illustrates to the Duce).

Visconti Prasca: Muleteer amounts are lands on which are one.

Duce: You have covered these roads?

Visconti Prasca: Yes, several times.

Duce: Now we come to the other two arguments. Specified all that, how many additional divisions do you think that it is necessary to send to Albania in order to occupy all the territory that leads to Athens?

Visconti Prasca: At first three organized mountain divisions would be enough; naturally the circumstances will decide.

Now these troops could be carried in the port of Arta in one single night.

Duce: Other argument, regular Albanian contribution in troops, and bands, to which I give one sure importance.

Visconti Prasca: We have introduced a plan with regard to. We would wanted to organized Bands from 2,500 to 3,000 men, organize by our officers.

Jacomoni: The questions are infinite. Many Muslims do not convene to send them in order to avoid that they make many vendettas.

Duce: Therefore a sure number of bands can you organize to them?

Visconti Prasca: And all organized. I have already done a telegram because they hold all ready and because the individuals perceive.

Duce: How are they armed?

Visconti Prasca: Some light machine-gun and bombs.

Duce: Now another aspect of the situation. Which measures you have taken on the Yugoslavian border?

Visconti Prasca: We have two divisions and a battalion of police officers and finance. In short a discreet cover.

The Greek Campaign

Duce: Not credible that there will be attacks from that part, and then the troops are leaned to already predisposed strong points.

Visconti Prasca: It must add that the land is well suited for the defense. Some infiltration could be verified through the forests, of small units, but nothing to fear because we have all the border trim. A finance post every 500 or 600 meters.

Jacomoni: In Albania there would be desire of some callback of classes.

Duce: What is the yield given by every class?

Jacomoni: Approximately 7,000 men.

Duce: This is from considering itself with attention. They are forces that also without to neglect or to reject, do not have that they constitute an excessive contribution in order not to make to believe that the Epiro has been by them conquered. A sure participation of the Albanian elements that does not disturb the population, would be opportune. I would make to call two or three classes.

The air defense must constitute object then of our particular interest because it must avoid, in the possible measure of, the bombing of the oil zone, of the Albanian cities, and the comparisons that could be made in better comparison of the defense of the city of Puglie. It is necessary therefore to prepare antiaircraft means of remarkable proportions.

Soddu: I have already decided that the 75 Skoda are sent had from Germany.

Visconti Prasca: The defense of Tirana is reduced to two groups, while all the defense for Albania is just 5 groups.

Duce: At least one hundred gun tubes are necessary for Albania because it must avoid the demoralizing diurnal bombing. To send all pieces Skoda and Oerlikon.

Soddu: We still have not had them all. As soon as they arrive I will send them.

The Oerlikon I will send them by air.

Duce: It must add to the land defense also the fighter aircraft. Fortunately of it we have a remarkable availability. On the first of October there were in Albania 52 apparatuses of ready employed and 15 not in immediate use. In short 67 apparatuses.

Ciano: the 74th Stormo is in departure.

Duce: It seems to me that we have examined all the aspects of the problem.

Badoglio: The details will come established by the General Staff of the Army.

Duce: Reassuming: offensive in Epiro; observation and pressure on Salonicco, and, in according to time, march on Athens.

The meeting has ended at 12:30 hours.

Automatic typewriter.

The minutes present has been approved of by the Duce at Palazzo Venezia, 16 October 1940 - XVIII - at 14:00 hours.

The Secretary

Lt. Col. assigned to C.S.D.

G.A. Trombetti

The Greek Campaign

Document n. 4

NOTE OF THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT TO THE GREEK GOVERNMENT
PRESENTED BY THE R. MINISTER G. RAZZI
TO THE GREEK PRIME MINISTER
AT 03:00 HOURS ANTEMERIDIAN OF 28 OCTOBER 1940

"The Italian Government has had repeatedly stated as in the course of the Greek Government puts them into effect conflict has assumed and maintained to UA attitude that is in contrast not only with that they are the normal relations of peace and of the good environs between two Nations, but with the precise duties that to the Greek Government derive from its condition of Neutral State. More over the Italian Government has been found in the necessity to recall the Greek Government to the observance of these duties, and to protest against their systematic violation, particularly serious violation for having the tolerated Greek Government that its territorial waters, its coasts and its ports were used by the British fleet in the course of its operations of war, favorite the refueling of the British air forces, premised the organization of a Military Intelligence Service in the Greek Archipelago to the damage of Italy. The Greek Government is perfectly to the current of these facts that have formed many times object than steps graduate to us from part of Italy, to which the Greek Government - than also account of the serious consequences of its attitude would have had to become - has not answered with some measure of protection of the own neutrality, but indeed he has intensified its action of abetting of the British Armed Forces and its collaboration with the enemies of Italy.

The Italian Government has the tests that such collaboration had been from the Greek Government previewed and regulated with understandings of military character, naval and aeronautical. The Italian Government does not only refer to the British guarantee, accepted from Greece as part of a program of action directed against the safety of Italy, but to the explicit and specifies engagements assumed from the Greek Government in order to put to disposition of the Powers in war with Italy important strategic positions on Greek territory, comprised between these the air force bases of Tessaglia and Macedonian, destined to an attack against the Albanian territory.

The Italian Government to this purpose must remember to the Greek Government the carried out provocative action towards the Albanian Nation with terroristic politics

The Greek Campaign

adopted by it in the cares of the populations of Ciamuria and with the persistent attempts to create disorders beyond its frontiers. Also for these facts the Italian Government has been - but uselessly - in the necessity to recall the Greek Government on the unavoidable consequences that such politics would have had in the cares of Italy.

All this cannot be from Italy further tolerated. The neutrality of Greece has gone becoming more and more mere appearance. The responsibility of this situation resides primarily with Great Britain and its purpose to always involving other countries in the war. But it is by now manifest that politics of the Greek Government have been and are directed to transform the Greek territory, or at least to allow that the Greek territory to be transformed into a base of war actions against Italy.

This could not carry that to an armed conflict between Italy and Greece, conflict that the Italian Government has all the intention to avoid.

The Italian Government has come therefore in the determination to ask the Greek Government, like guarantee of the neutrality of Greece and like guarantee of the safety of Italy, the faculty to occupy with our own Armed Forces, for the duration of the present conflict with Great Britain, some strategic points in Greek territory. The Italian Government asks the Greek Government who does not oppose to such occupation and obstacles the free passage of the troops destined to complete it. These troops are not introduced as enemies of the Greek people, and in no way the Italian Government means that the temporary occupation of some strategic points dictated from contingent necessities and of pure defensive character, ports prejudgment to the sovereignty and independence of Greece.

The Italian Government asks the Greek Government who it immediately gives to the military authorities the necessary orders because such occupation can happen in pacific way. Where the Italian troops had to meet resistances, such resistances will be folded with arms and the Government would assume the responsibility of any consequences that would derive".

The Greek Campaign

Document n. 5

REPORT OF THE MEETING HELD IN THE WORKROOM OF THE DUCE AT
PALAZZO VENEZIA

10 NOVEMBER 1940 - XIX, 11:00 HOURS (stenographic Report)

Present: *The Duce, Excellency Badoglio, Cavagnari, Pricolo, Roatta, Colonel Sorice*
Secretary: *Lt. Col. Trombetti*

Duce - The goal of this meeting is to make the point on the Albanian situation after fourteen days from the beginning of operations. The first ascertainment that must be made is following: that the things have not gone as could be thought and as they had made to hope and the political leader Deputy General for Albania, Jacomoni, and General Visconti Prasca, commander the troops in Albania.

The plan of Visconti Prasca was based on two elements: one of military character (a sure number of divisions), the other of political character (one turned that it would have had to break the back of the Greek troops). Doubts remained some actions of sabotage that could be thought to develop from the fifth column.

All that is not happened, indeed it is happened the exactly contrary. While it has not been any sign of revolt of the populations of Ciamuria behind the Greek troops, they have been instead of the serious phenomena much from part of some Albanian units.

From a report of General Roatta, beyond to the particular on the behavior of the Albanian battalion Tomori, other details are learned: of an Albanian police officer surprised to cut the telephone threads; desertion cases; distribution of anti-Italian inserts, etc. Therefore a situation that is clearly contrary to that me it has been described, at least in this first period.

Lacking these political elements, it has been seen at once that the forces of which arranged Visconti Prasca were not sufficient; the two divisions to the Korciano border were not sufficient; as just sufficient the forces located towards the sea.

Note: the phrases in italics have been stricken by Mussolini during the reading, for his approval, of the report.

The Greek Campaign

This plan would be successful if instead of having of the columns employed in one advance that I call lenticular, ourselves had been the more compact masses.

Eight days ago - for giving a test of the optimism that reigned in the Albanian atmospheres - Gen. Ranza assured me that for the evening of Saturday Janina would have been taken (and therefore it was useless to bomb it) and, later, Prevesa and of there would have been without to lose time in direction of Athens.

All this optimism absolutely is unfounded and what has been seen from the events has made the Greeks.

Their plan was enough well devised. To threaten from Korçiano the rear of our alignment; to reject the Julia and to try to arrive to the line of communications road.

Fact is the Greek General Staff thought that also the troops of the Shoreline would have been found in difficulty. Fortunately this dynamism of the Greek army - to my warning - already it has been getting exhausted, or it is being getting exhausted, for lack of impulse and just because we have supplied in these days to strengthen all our devices.

We have carried on the front of Korçia the divisions Venezia and Arezzo and I have ordered to divert on Valona the div. Bari. The forces that are currently to my south seem that they are sufficient in order to hold the situation.

The problem of now knowing that is placed what is made. For regards the men I am of the warning that must leave them where they are. To remove the command to Visconti Prasca that has optimism since, to my opinion, would be an error, because it would be devoted that the Italian troops have had a failure. Truly a failure not has been, for that the Greeks have advanced of 5 km. towards Korçiano and have rejected the Julia, while we have advanced of 20-30 km. astride of the Kalamas. We have constituted, here, bridges that we must maintain at any cost in order to resume the operations in that field.

Excluded therefore the change of the persons, they have had however to organize the commands who appeared at first enough confused.

For this goal Gen. Soddu has been sent, since the first days was the man on top of the situation. Beside there is Nasci that, to the front of Korçia, has already said: "nobody moves me here".

Rossi, who commands in Ciamuria, is also to his place, for which task that these are of the men to the height of their tasks.

The problem that is placed today is that one of the resumption of the operations, that goes to determined in order "how" and "when".

It cannot be begun if it is not nearly sure to give a remarkable blow to the Greek army.

Task that the program that I will read to you since it is little sufficient in order to see that what must be made as shipment of men. It is clearly that only the theater

The Greek Campaign

where it can be operated is the Jonico, while it is being firm in the Pindo and the Korciano.

It can be thought that there will be some days of cold, but it cannot be thought that the cold is like what there is already today on mountains of the Macedonian.

(To this point the Duce gives reading of a "Note for the Joint Chief of Staff" stopping to illustrate some directives).

Letter "C" of the Note: "the 9th Army it comprises, on the feature of Korçia, the divisions Piemonte, Arezzo, Parma, Venezia, which do not have to be moved etc.".

Oral clarification of the Duce: therefore the 4 divisions are found in a quite rigid climate. They will make what it has been made in the world war, in which the infantrymen was to 2000 meters and resisted. Draft of give him only adapts winter clothing, provisions of comfort, etc to. The total of the forces of the 9th Army, calculating also div. alp. of reserve and the Julia and Bari on the front of the Pindo, amounts to therefore the number of 63 battalions. From now in then the "division" of line each will be composed of three regiments of three battalions, otherwise the military terminology must be completely changed. It is my deep conviction that, if the Julia had had a regiment between its alignment, would not have made that advance to delineate that it has lead it to that withdraw.

Roatta - The mountain divisions would need to leave them in theirs actual constitution because...

Duce - For the mountain divisions, quick and the that armor it is another thing. I refer to the divisions of line infantry.

Badoglio - Therefore, in the central area, with the divisions Julia and Bari and with the Tridentina with two regiments, we will have a total of 11 alpine battalions and 6 of infantry, more the three regiments than of bersaglieres not attached that now they are scattered in several points. Since they are on bicycles is well to leave them where they are.

Duce - (Continues to read the Note).

Letter "D": "the task of the 9th Army is defensive for all the winter, but the not expectable case, of a concomitant action of Bulgaria".

Oral clarification of the Duce: until this moment Bulgaria does not have the air of wanting itself to move and will remain firm until March, less than a sure push from part of the Germans does not take part, in agreement with Russia (sees travel of Molotov to Berlin).

Saying "defensive task for all the winter", I do not mean to say to be absolutely firm, but to limit the actions, to improve the situation and to little resume those of land that the Albanians, and not the Italians, have lost. The operations to strategic beam I exclude for all the winter season to them.

(Continues to read the Note).

The Greek Campaign

Letter "F": "Objective of the 11th Army: resumption of the offensive, as soon as the climate, also winter, allows it. To such goal it must reinforce the 11th Army with another four divisions plus two in reserve. Total 10 complete divisions ".

Oral clarification of the Duce: therefore I preview, for the crushing of Greece - that I want absolutely to reach - five divisions in more than those that Greece can effectively mobilize. That turns out from the monograph compiled on Greece in care of the General Staff, than I have carefully read. It seems that the data have been indicated with all the possible exactitude to you.

Roatta - Those data are exact. All the news that is had confirm that situation, but the ability to mobilize of Greece, like number of men, is much advanced. It could be given that with the English aid the Greek Command could put something more.

Duce - This is very important because it strengthens my thesis "tempo".

(Continuation to read letter "F") "This preparation of men and means must be made to burn the stops, waves to prevent that Great Britain gives to Greece a efficient aid, and above all for reasons of prestige. All the divisions must be in Albania ready to the employment not later then 5 December".

Oral clarification of the Duce: I mean that the Italian army rests long time under this moral situation being unsuccessful to smash in the Greek defensive system.

(He illustrates on the base of relative data the shipment in A.O. as the period of time assigned to the S.M. [5 December next] for the arrival of the new forces in Albania is not short too much).

If the divisions still had to be mobilized he could think insufficient this time; but a prospect that me has been sent from the Ministry of the War dated 3 October 1940, says to me that there are ready

- to the 70-80% of the war personnel - 13 divisions of infantry.

If this news is exact that has been supplied to me, I have in Italy prepared a good 13 divisions of infantry, of which I ask only 6, plus three more in reserve.

Now I say: if in the 1935 we have been able to move to Libya, Eritrean and Somalia the effectives of 12 divisions in two months is it truly impossible to carry the effectives of 6 divisions in Albania in 25 days? That as well as more in how much concurs today three new facts: the brevity of the way (going from the Puglia in Albania in one night); the greater experience that we must have in matter of transports; the availability of an aerial fleet that naturally cannot replace the marine traffic, if not in modest measure, but however sensitive.

One air division, carrying out 15 trips per month, could transport 45,000 men, and carry also some guns.

The Greek Campaign

In the more modest hypothesis of the transport only 1000 men per day, the aerial fleet will dispense the marine of the transport of 15,000 men, which means to engage for less than 10 steamboats.

Roatta - The transport of the men does not give us trouble, because on the ships, on which we put materials and trucks, we embark the trucks, we embark the men on deck. The problem to resolve refers to the transport of the quadrupeds, the materials and the trucks.

Duce -(continuing to read the note).

"Fleet of transports: ... the aerial transports will be used:

b) in order to transport police officers and financial polices with one cadence of 50-100 per day ".

Oral clarification of the Duce: they will serve in order to garrison Northern Albania and in order to face the danger of infiltrations of bands of emissaries of Zogu. For this it is necessary that there are many financial polices trying to eliminate – according to the cases and the circumstances - the Albanian police officers.

(Continuation to read the Note).

"Aerial military action: during this period of preparation the two strengthened air squadrons will continue to bomb Greece and protect Albania ".

Oral clarification of the Duce: because it does not have to subject to usury, excessive the men and means. It must protect Albania and I insist on this point, because there is no doubt that the moral of the Albanians is shaken. The same Verlaçi has said: "I expected that high power as yours to act like the lighting". I have documented myself, and I must remind that the campaign of Norway begun in April and ended in June. There are of the fact conditions that such blitzkrieg absolutely prevent. It is risen instead one be of mind that Visconti Prasca and Jacomoni had diffused with their optimism, and that it had been diffused in the world through the correspondences of newspapers. The journalists feeling: tomorrow we will be at Janina, therefore at Prevesa etc. their correspondences inspire to these forecasts.

In this period of pause it is necessary that aviation makes that one cannot follow the other.

(to read the Note).

"These incessant bombings will have:

a) to demonstrate to the Greek populations that the competition of English aviation is insufficient or null;

b) to disorganize the civil life of Greece, being seeded the panic wherever
 "Therefore you must choose - square kilometer by square kilometer - Greece to bomb. All Greece, including the islands, has a surface of 130,000 km²., which the arable part from the bombs does not exceed the 50,000 square kilometers.

The Greek Campaign

All the city centers more than to 10,000 inhabitants must be destroyed and be razed to the ground. An compulsory order this is. Naturally beyond these centers they must be hit also military objectives.

It must make to see that the English aerial aid does not exist, or that it is in such proportions from not being able to prevent this systematic destruction of the city centers of Greece. It will be the second time that that happens in the history, because next to the first time ourselves thought Rome.

Now before giving the word to Marshal Badoglio, I will point out to the political situation that could not be more favorable for our operations in Greece:

1) Yugoslavia does not move, and has sacrificed the minister of the war to the requirements of the Germanic General Staff. I do not exclude that already the German troops cross into Yugoslavia.

2) Bulgaria is a thorn in the flank of the Greeks.

3) Russia does not move and it is moving closer to Berlin.

This is the first action of an understanding that must combine to the Axis also Russia; it is excluded that it enters in the Tri-party agreement, but is not excluded that an understanding takes part between us and Russia.

4) The situation of England is not clear, if yesterday Churchill hardly has limited himself to state that they are still alive. With this I do not want to say that England is on its knees; it will still resist and it will give us of the thread to twist. However it must above all think to defend the metropolis and Egypt. I believe that the Greeks are in one phase of disappointment: among other things they have asked 20 million pounds and if they are seen some to only offer 5 with interests.

Concluding, I believe that the Greek initiative against us is exhausted or is getting exhausted and, in any case, I do not represent more a danger to hold in exaggerated consideration, for the reasons that I have exposed in this moment. And necessary to resume the action and with a objective that, at first, would have to be limited to the Prevesa-Arta line, but this operation that must demonstrate that we are willing of the situation, must makes, because I cannot tolerate that in the world the conviction is diffused that we have not been able to strike the Greeks.

Badoglio - You allow, Duce, of tell something that has been carried out before the preparation that we are now making.

Have the total diary: 14 October you have a meeting with us here - me and Roatta - and have placed the problem of how many troops were necessary in order to attack Greece. Roatta, based on the studies made by the General Staff, declared that twenty divisions were necessary, *and three months of time in order to put them to foot the work with all the their material and their services. You have approved of our arranged point of view and that the relative provisions were begun of course.*

It was a matter therefore of the shipment of another ten divisions, and he had himself spoken as well

The Greek Campaign

of a armed forces high command and another Army commander to send. *But then the day after you have changed idea.*

On 15 October you have a meeting with us here again. They were present also: Count Ciano, Gen. Soddu, Deputy Jacomoni and General Visconti Prasca.

As a result of the decisions made from Count Ciano that give Deputy Jacomoni and from Gen. Visconti Prasca, You took the decision to attack on 26 October, date that - as it is known - then was moved to 28 October. We have tried to make in the better way all that that could be made in that period of time.

I have made this decisions in order to demonstrate that as well as the Joint Chief of Staff how much the General Staff of the R.E. is not entered in this organization, than has carried out itself in clearly contrary way to all our system, than hinged on the principle to prepare itself before then to dare well. *They are not therefore responsible of how much happens neither the Joint Chief of Staff nor that one of the Army.*

Saying this, I come to the substantial part. Just you say of wanting the divisions with three regiments. I have been the fiercest opposition of the division with two. We must therefore send eight regiments of infantry that we must remove from other divisions, and - for the eight regiments of artillery eight groups of artillery, in order to carry the divisions to the ternary formation.

More the army corps are formed and the armies are formed.

Now it must think that the Greeks will use this time for work of fortification, for which they have demonstrated a sure ability. After that these positions will have to be attacked. Since not always aviation can allow, it must send 5 regiments of army corps artillery and 2 regiments with army artillery. These forces are in more of the 6 divisions of which we have spoken.

It is true that we in the 1935 have sent a lot of things in Africa and that the travel was along, but then we had a ship much superior one to puts into effect them. I have made the trip with the Conte di Biancamano that he has boarded thousands of men and then much Massaua that Mogadishu was lend very more of the most unfortunate port of Durazzo.

Therefore I would want to have a meeting with Navy and the General Staff of the Army in order to consider details: troops and means of transport, availability of steamboats, possibility of unloading, most to Valona than to Durazzo (note for incidence that, given the conditions of the sea, have this today not been able to send anything) and then to come to propose to You - Duce - the exact term that is necessary for us in order to attack Greece. It does not have that we only think next to the transport of these troops, but also to the logistic equipment, because, otherwise, our troops make a push and then they are stopped.

When task to the Greek transaction I feel myself to go up in flames to our face.

The Greek Campaign

We in two days can make this study and will be in a position to tell - ended the transport - in order which day we will be ready. I must add that behind these forces we will have to be all hospital equipment and that the general services them will put them to immediate capacity of the troops. When we make this study tiny and precise, animated from the same desire, you can you give the order for us to attack.

Roatta - Not I know if it is possible what I say, but if we could have use of the Yugoslavian railroads for part of the transports that are necessary to us, of it we would have an enormous advantage. Naturally these transports would come made with all the necessary circumspect. (Subjects to the Duce an illustrative paper of the lines for the application of the proposal).

Duce - One proposed of the sort introduces two disadvantages:

- 1) if the proposal is rejected, "it remained for less badly, and one be of uneasiness in the comparisons of the Yugoslavia is created;
- 2) if the proposal comes accepted, the disadvantage can turn out greater, for that one is created our situation of gratitude towards that State that at the present moment is better not to determine. However I would try it.

Badoglio - the German troops cross Yugoslavia...

Duce - In this case also we could make it, because that would be the signal that the Yugoslavia has chosen for the Axis. In this case we can ask also the transport for troops. I repeat, it can be tried in unofficial way, even if there were 10 probabilities on 100. It will have to ask through the Ministry of the Foreign countries if the German troops have crossed Yugoslavia. In this case the probabilities go up to 50-60.

All that must make it with a lot - delicacy, also in order not to offend their susceptibility. The transports will have to be masked also from the point of view of the population. How we are to ship from traffic? The famous "ships regions" are what?

Cavagnari -, "ships regions" are used for the transports in North Africa because they do not have the possibility to berth in the port of Durazzo. In this port, more than 2-3 steamboats cannot stop, and also these come to find themselves in dangerous position.

Duce - In any case Benini says me that the drainage ability has a capacity to 3-4,000 tons per day.

Roatta -65,000 per month.

Duce - and the port of Valona?

Cavagnari - the difficulty is for the evacuation from the congestions on land, because there is one single effusion road.

Roatta - As an example, the div. Bari from 30 October have not still completed the disembarkation now. The troops have gone ahead. To Valona they are necessary, for the disembarkation operations motor vehicles and another 8-10 days, if it is dealt to disembark quadrupeds are necessary 4-5 days. The ability to drainage of motor vehicles is

The Greek Campaign

small. The steamboat issue does not have a great importance, because they are exuberant regarding the ability to drainage of the Albanian ports.

I repeat: the transport of the men does not give some thought to us, while those that constitute serious worries are above all the transports of the mountain units. Every division with 3 regiments has 3,000 quadrupeds. The mountain division with the force puts into effect has 5,900 quadrupeds; the steamboats carry 450-500 each, and the disembarkation is made a little for time.

Allowing us to carry over there the automotive equipment would allow us to replace the railroads. We have a production of motor vehicles of 1,200 approximately, and therefore not sending anything more to North Africa, in Albania could be organized automotive transports.

Duce - the 1,200 motor vehicles that we produce send them in Albania as they arrive?

Roatta - Those of the Corps are 2,000. To the end we will come to having 8-10,000 motor vehicles, but creed, wanting to be in the truth, than it cannot be made very in order to accelerate the tempo.

Duce - However it must do all that is possible, because the time works against us.

Roatta - the departure of the divisions does not give thought to us. We would want knew which it must be the succession.

Duce - This is from examining on the base of the technical elements. First one or the other does not have importance.

Roatta - In order to make headway to the program total, and to maintain the other divisions with a decent force, we have calculated to recall 100,000 men approximately. It will not convene to recall people that we have already sent to home from some days.

Duce - Sure, men of other classes call themselves. Of the rest 100,000 men do not disturb the Country and then there will be of that they wish of being recalled.

Badoglio - Then I would re-unite the Chiefs of general staff and I will prepare a conscientious study.

Duce - It goes well. As soon as ready the conclusions, Monday or Tuesday, you will warn me.

(The meeting has ended at 12:30 hours).

The present minutes has been approved of by the Duce at Palazzo Venezia 11 November 1940, XIX, at 18:00 hours.

The Greek Campaign

Document n. 6

FROM THE COMANDANTE SUPERIORE F.A. ALBANIA, GENERAL SODDU
TO THE HEAD OF CABINET OF THE UNDERSECRETARY FOR WAR,
COLONEL SORICE

15.XI.1940

Dearest Sorice,

The attack in course is serious, above all for that it stretches to remove half Nasi and to isolate the 11th Army.

Consequence of this beastly alignment is enormous and to isolated blocks, that the possibilities concur all with the enemy, and of my unfortunate situation, not to have reserves.

I have studied an eventual withdraw in order to shorten the front and I would have already put into effect it, if it were not the most difficult execution, not having to my disposition forces to line up on the chosen positions and lacking the command organizing in order to direct them. Moreover the units are noticed with the lines of pieces and the arms and therefore the means for the movement and regression lack the material.

Per your instruction Vercellino still yesterday evening I have said that it does not feel itself to assume the commander in these conditions of absolute lack of connections and staff of command.

From this you can understand which sacrifice of my name and my past of soldier I have made for our beloved Leader, facing a bankrupt situation, without means. Not there is in Albania any engineer unit of the connections! Remember that Nasi has 70 km. of front and he does not have a telephone!

The war is serious what and I am making it with means of the 1848!

The Greek artillery is optimal, very well trained and most modern!

Stanotte Peraldo, Fornara and Rossi, have cleared up the situation a little at Erseke! It thinks that the div. "Bari", division equipped from disembarkation, fights in mountain without mules and with the single line of pieces of a group! All the rest extended between Valona and the division in name!

You keep in mind that Nasi yesterday from evening is fighting against seven authentic divisions (div. ternary with artilleries from 105) supported from troops and services of army corps - and it does not arrange, as I see that to Rome

The Greek Campaign

believes, of five divisions, but of the head of divisions that are noticed and that it will still be necessary time before they are complete.

The lines up is only 25 bds.

Finally, enemy aviation is acting of domineering and if Ranza does not come reinforced timely, it will not be more in a position to supporting the action, as has made until yesterday with remarkable sacrifices.

Lacking means and above all having to employ those that arrive for stop it makes them, I do not have way to straighten at once a bad departure situation.

And spoken to me of Messe the head of a mass rout!

Here they are in condition for having to avoid that break of my front and when I am forced and to withdraw, are in the hand of God!

These are vents for you and in order to orient to you in order to illuminate the Duce on the situation that daily we live in these days.

If I succeed to check the effort in course of the Greeks, then it can be acted and be made up for to all.

He thinks that I have the gun tubes of artillery that can decide online of 1/2 or one unit of fire. The shots do not come online complete, but the cartages even lack timers!

Deficiency of provisions! They will say to you that all is sent! They had to send in April!

They have fallen in the easy-goingness to say that Albania is near! They have not thought next to the grips of the ports and the enormous distances and badness of the roads of Albania.

In all today I do not have that the regiment artillery of a single Corps of the Army: those Visconti!

All the rest is mobilizing in Italy! The Albanian bds they have dissolved from if, one bd has sold to the Greeks the arms and the ammunitions, isolated turn the campaign with ours arms and ammunitions and I have had to organize to the rear the hunting of bandits! I am repressing, adopting rigor measures. All the bourgeois who rule, keep quiet and are themselves locked at home with the tail between the legs.

In order today enough! I have plagued to you enough.

I am serene and therefore my General Staff, but sure the situation is most delicate. I embrace you

aff.mo U. Soddu

FROM SUPREME COMMANDER F.A. ALBANIA, GEN. SODDU TO THE HEAD
OF CABINET OF THE UNDERSECRETARY OF THE WAR, COL. SORICE

15 November 1940 - XIX – 13:00 hours

Dear Sorice,

I return now from the "Bari": ten hours between flight and car. Also it is here alive in the organic accoutrements. Itself the draw of six bn. with 500 men.

Therefore a modest brigade, equipped as I have said to you from disembarkation, that it fights in mountain!

They are the thirteen and Geloso, Batistes are not looked at! And the 11^a Army is in full crisis! I send you a communication - in copy - that I have made for the General Staff R. Army for you that it illustrious the Head.

Here we are to a delicate point: it is necessary to have exact the feeling of how much happens at the front, and instead it is in delay and incomplete here. You understand as it is difficult to be a person with a sense of timing.

In order to put to me to place as commander I could without order an withdraw, but I prefer to play to me, rather than to throw down the events.

A personal feeling tells me that resisting - and the resistance it I can still expect, given the not strong losses of the units - crisis of the enemy can provoke one before an arrest to his offensive.

Sure units would be necessary trained and commanded by persons who know the trade and they do not give persons whom they believe acquitted their task screaming "forward" without to say where, how! In the more serious point I have sent Bancale and Mannerihi, but without means of command. However I have sent one head!

You say to me what news! They are little and conflicting those that I receive if you pass all, you lose the calm and the guideline.

I am awake, control and decide and then I inform.

Insufficient aggressive spirit who had to the bales begins, to the excessive wearing down, the Insufficient culture of the soldier and to the bad employment criteria are in the strategic field, are in that tactical.

A beloved embrace from

yours aff.mo Soddu

P.S. - they want from us many and many aircraft.

"AFTER THE SPEECH OF THE DUCE
BALLAST... SMALL BOURGEOIS "
(Article of the daily paper *Il Regime Fascista*)
22 November 1940

The Duce in his last speech, here where are given to the Party energetic directives, has whipped to blood which he has called "small bourgeois ballast". A phrase is therefore precise that would not deserve clarification. But, unfortunately, social class with one is who on purpose wants to confuse mentality.

"Small bourgeois ballast" you want to characterize those surviving bourgeois areas that have conserved a small mentality. When the underhanded Jew effective or the wicked Jew honorarium pretends to affect themselves because Mussolini "has intentional" to hit the bourgeoisie, they know of being in perfect disloyalty. He calls to you in cause are not the middle and lower social classes, that they constitute the backbone of the Nation, and of which fan leave all those that direct the production and those that in the skies, on the ships, in the squares of the Army, live heroic pages; but those who in contrast with the fascist style, still enslaved of a mentality, shows the single energy in criticizing all and all, in trying in every occasion to depress the public spirit.

The small bourgeois mentality is that one that avoids and hates and fears the risk, loves the peace at all costs, that is the pacifism that is then gutless; that one that has always followed politics of the house foot; that one that admires the power and the overbearingness of the foreigners.

In the admonishment of Mussolini to the Party they are intentional therefore to characterize the noble sirs who guides rumor in the pestilential drawing-room, that one that suffers not to more be able to visit the tailor than Paris, the son of the father that cannot more display the English cut, the arteriosclerotic that passes the day sink on a seat in the idle city circles, the idle one that it rambles from caffè to caffè, and all those who the revolutionary march of the Fascism has unfortunately saved you.

Against them it must be rigid, also for that with the rigid justice it is indirectly come to reward the working people whom it firmly believes in its Duce and in the sure Victory of his Native land and for the Victory he operates in silence ready to whichever sacrifice.

Without doubt, all the enrolled ones that they do not crowd you in the Party in these last times have the conscience of their duties. But here it can endured

The Greek Campaign

to make up for with a pair of sweeping blows. The hierarchies - from the secretary of the Party to the secretary of the smallest bundle than province - have had precise directives. Especially in this moment Italy asks of Mussolini from them implacable energies.

Naturally ridicule would be what that we had ourselves to be alarmed of the ominous action that comes outside from these dead angles. The people are too much aware of the hour that we cross and knows too much well that we are we only engaged in the fight for securing true freedom, a sure well-being and a long era of peace.

It knows that the war us has been imposing. We exited from the Ethiopian enterprise and the Spanish conflict and had need to be calm in order to put in value our lands of beyond the sea, but the democracies, pushed by the International Jewry, after to have shameless lied at Monaco, we have believed that the hour was arrived in order to pull down the totalitarian States.

The issue of Danzig was not that a futile pretext. In fact hardly Great Britain declared war on the Reich was spoken to exterminate first of the German people then and that Italian. The forces of the Axis could not remain impassible when they were in game the common freedom and integrity. The Italian people all know this today and are conscious of his duty.

The news on the alternate vicissitudes of a battle can some far shake his faith. Mussolini has spoken clearly. Mussolini has proclamation that the modern Carthaginians will be defeated and that Greece will end with broken kidneys. We are sure that all this will be come true, even if some improvidence and unsuitableness of the Commander of the Joint Chief of Staff has allowed to Churchill of having a foolish diversion.

But all the evils do not come for harm. Greater will be our reaction, more tremendous the unraveling of the enemy.

Troubles to touch the Italians in theirs just armor.

Our history has the power to teach among many things also this.

ANSWER OF BADOGLIO TO FARINACCI

I would not be excused from silence that they imposed on me, if the companion supported against me, mainly from the noted Cremonan daily paper, had not assumed the form puts into effect. A form that make shame who have promoted them, and that, falsely justified, they have tried and they try to raise against my person I disdain and the popular depreciation. I break by silence because the critics of which the standard bearer avv. Farinacci has been made goes beyond my person and invests all the Italian General Staff.

Such critics, in a moment in which every voice of discord would have said nothing about of the forefront to the supreme necessities of the Native land, have discredited to the inside and the outside, the work and the value of the Italian S.M.. And it is too much soon in order to judge such works and such value in the suffering of the hour that it passes, because the facts that only can give to light on have been completed from the Italian Corps of S.M., must necessarily be held secrets; but I know that to day leaving History that from its pages erupt that light, because is made justice of sure hateful plot. He will look at himself then with which patriotism the Italian Corps of S.M. has churns on sure most delicate is made of the political conduct of this war.

However: it is very clear end of now that to You, avv. Farinacci, I do not recognize the right of it the quality to assume supreme censor to you of the work of the Italian S.M.. Nor to You, by it to that one current from You commanded that it is worried to pontificate waves is disclosed sure at all local ideas nothing. You know very well, avv. Farinacci, that those critics they do not touch the Italian S.M.; if for luck know (and the this it would not amaze to me much), cause, You sure of it you have means, makes you to illustrate from who can, on the content of mine many relations made in the secret sitting of the Council of war. From such relations it turns out in indisputable way which were the understandings mine, totally you flavored yourself from the S.M. all, on the strategic conduct and political of the war in action. Without wanting to make of the detections I can say that every my directive was dominated from the independent action. Collaboration, submission not.

The S.M. had to be left absolutely free in its responsibilities of the decisions, free of whichever interference, whichever nature. A S. M. as ours it cannot and does not have to be legacy to this or that stone; in the art of the war the movement freedom is an essential factor. And when I say this, to You avv. Farinacci, you mean to me well; the Italian S.M. is not second to anybody and is its Saint pride that does not have need

The Greek Campaign

of being held to leash from this or those landlords. When if of it he asks the opinion is not rejected a priori for necessity of political fetters; this fact often determines the most serious errors of appraisal that can have reflected incalculable on all the strategy of the war. The S.M. must then know that in every moment it must authority, the force and means for being able to operate ready and with safety in the supreme only interest of the Native land.

And finally the S.M. does not have to be burdened of elements which doubtful are entrusted duties, because they do not have familiarity – with the military art.

Not enough, avv. Farinacci, for being general, applying the Greek on the cap! We must make the war; enough not to call the Head of S.M. for telling them: *We must make the war!*

Enough in order not to make war to then allocate the hyperbolic budgets in order administer to the S.M. with a dropper! When people have in mind to strike themselves, first of all it is necessary that the industrial equipment of the Nation endures the slow and serious suffering that transforms it into being ready at the opportune moment to produce for the war. Every effort, every will, every energy must be coordinated and be disciplined for this purpose vital, - various at the necessary moment encounter to burning humiliation, not only will be gone from the military point of view.

A Nation that enters in war must preview in the possible limit of every the adverse fatality waves makes force you. If an allying is lawful to count also on aid of the eventual one, it is not test to trust in all on the aid this allying; that that can carry to future historical consequences of immense capacity that they will powerful weigh on - the life of a Nation.

Avv. Farinacci, I do not want to make dissertations of high military strategy of the high politics; it is not the case. It is said once for all that I in my quality of Head of S.M. since from 1934, admonished the Body of S.M. to put in every work to want waves I was myself anytime ready to the supreme danger. From then I have always insisted because all the country with all could be mobilization its reservoirs to the goal of being able to face at the intentional moment the hard work of the combat.

This is wide and at great length documented in my periodic relations in the sitting secret of the Council of war, the rest, avv. Parinacci, is a ignoble machine warp to my damages, and You know it.

My patriotism and my desire to concur to an August order prohibit to me to come down to other particular, and the hour is not this more adapted in order to seed discords and sideslips in the heroism of people ours to which I augur luminous destiny.

Note: this letter, diffused clandestinely in typewritten form, has been recognized work not of Badoglio, but of another person, arrested then by the OVRA in the February 1941 (Cf. De Felice; *Mussolini l'Alleato*, Einaudi, Turin 1990, I, p. 345, n. 2).

The Greek Campaign

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The Greek Campaign

INDEXES

The Greek Campaign

852
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The Greek Campaign

INDEX OF THE SKETCHES

1 The deployment of the Italian G.U. in May 1940	Page
25	
2 The Italian alignment 1.10.1940	"51
3 The street situation of the theater on 28.10.1940	" 87
4 The direction of operations from Albania to Greece	"91
5 The direction of operations from Greece to Albania	" 93
6 Defensive Lines against the direction of operations of the Skumbini	"95
7 Defensive Lines against the direction of operations of Vojussa	" 96
8 The plan of Guzzoni-Pariani (1939)	"99
9 The plan Geloso (August 1940)	" 105
10 The plan for the Contingency G of S.M.R.E. (Sept.. 1940)	"107
11 The plan Visconti Prasca (September 1940)	" 109
12 The operating task of the <i>Ciamuria</i> army corps	"123
13 The task of the Julia alp. Div.	"124
14 The operating task of the Litorale grouping	" 125
15 Articulation of command in Albania 28.10.1940	" 127.
16 Deployment in peace time of the Greek army in 1939	"133
17 Plan IB	"140
18 flat IBa	"142
19 The IBa line and the alternatives positions T2, T3 and T4	" 149
20 Greek defensive lines	"153
21 The ordering for the attack to the road node of Kalibaki	" 160
22 The forcing of the Kalamas from part of the <i>Siena</i> Inf. Div.	"164
23 The design of attack of 5 November at Kalibaki	" 165
24 The offensive on the lower Kalamas (5-9 November)	" 166
25 The operations on the Pindo from the 28 to 31 October	" 174
26 The operations on the Pindo from the 10 to 3 November	"177
27 The operations on the 4 to 9 November	"180
28 The operations of the <i>Julia</i> alp. Div. from 28 October to 10 November	"183
29 The front of Bilishti on 28 October	" 185
30 The situation in the Korçano on 6 November	"190
31 The situation in the field of the 11 th Army 10 November	" 220

The Greek Campaign

32 The alignment of the XXVI Army Corps on 12 November	Page 224
33 The Greek operating design in W. Macedonian	"232
34 The Greek attack to the Morova (14-17 November)	" 237
35 The situation in the Korçano 18 November	"243
36 The intermingling with the units in the 9 th Army (19 November)	"247
37 The withdraw with the troops with the 9 th Army (21-23 November)	"252
38 The Greek attack to the southern flank of the 9 th Army (19-21 November)	" 256
39 The alignment of the 9 th Army 25 to November	"259
40 The front with Pogradec (27-30 November)	" 263
41 The situation of the 9 th Army on 30 November	"266
42 The situation of the III Army Corps on 3 December.	" 268
43 The alignment with the <i>Ciamuria</i> Army Corps on 14 November	"271
44 The alignment with the 11 th Army on 14 November	" 273
45 The operating perspectives with the 11 th Army on 17 November	"276
46 The alignment with the VIII Army Corps on 17 November	" 278
47 The passage between the 9 th Army and the 11 th Army in the high valleys of the Osum 22 November	"285
48 The alignment of XXV the Army Corps on 17 November	" 286
49 The beginning with the withdraw of the VIII Army Corps and the Greek attack (21 – 22 November)	“288
50 The situation of the 11 th Army in withdraw at 12:00 of 22 November	"289
51 The situation to north of the Vojussa on 26 November.	" 293
52 The situation at the Epirus frontier 26 November.	"295
53 The Suhes-Zagorias furrow and Greek operating possibilities	" 298
54 The 11 th Army withdraw of the from the 24 to 30 November	"305
55 The counterpoising forces 18 November	" 312
56 The logistic alignment on 10 December	" 334
57 The operations on the front of the 9 th Army from the 1 to 4 December	" 339
58 The alignment with the III Army Corps on 1 December	"342
59 The front with the Devoli (5-9 December).	" 344
60 The operations of the 9 th Army from the 9 to 17 December	" 347
61 The alignment with the XXVI Army Corps 19 December	"351

The Greek Campaign

62 The Albania south-western and the Greek operating possibilities	Page 356
63 Contraposition alignments in the field of the 11 th Army on 8 Decembers	" 360
64 The sector of the VIII Army Corps (7 December)	" 362
65 The Osum and Ambum sector (11-15 December)	" 368
66 The Vojussa and Zagorias sector (5-20 December)	" 371
67 The alignment with the XXV army corps (10-15 December)	" 379
68 The operating design with the Greek army corps (15 Decembers)	" 388
69 The sector with the Litorale (15-20 December)	" 391
70 The operating design with the Greek offensive of the yearend	" 399
71 The sector of the Kurvalesh (25-31 dicembre)	" 403
72 The situation of the <i>Modena</i> division on 31 December.	" 406
73 The Vojussa sector on 31 December	" 413
74 The Greek alignment on 6 January 1941	" 443
75 The Greek attack to Mali Qarishta (8-9 January)	" 448
76 The situation on the front of Berat after the fall of Klisura (14 January)	" 457
77 The situation between Osum and Vojussa 14 January	" 459
78 The morphologic Outline of the Deshnicës valley	" 464
79 The alignment of the IV and VIII army corps on 21 January	" 465
80 The alignment with the VIII and XXV army corps on 21 January	" 467
81 The alignment with the IV army corps on 31 January	" 471
82 The alignment with the VIII army corps on 31 January	" 473
83 The situation of the sector of the XXV army corps 10 January	" 480
84 The situation with the left wing of the XXV army corps on 21 January	" 484
85 Outline with counter-maneuver of Klisura	" 486
86 The maneuver design with the special army corps (January 1941)	" 496
87 The alignment with the XXV army corps on 10 February	" 532
88 The orohydrography outline with the main zone with the battle with Tepeleni	" 539
89 The Greek operating design for the conquest of Valona	" 541
90 The attack with the Greek 5 th Inf. Div. to the Shendeli (13 February)	" 543
91 The attack with the Greek 2 nd Inf. Div. in Zagorias valley and on Golico (15 February)	" 546

The Greek Campaign

92 The situation in the sector of Tepeleni 25 February.	Page 557
93 The resumption of the Greek offensive on Tepeleni (7-12 March)	"561
94 The first operating plan of Gen. Gambarà (20 February)	"591
95 The plan based on the directives n. 18 (28 February)	"596
96 The situation of the IV Army Corps 7 March	" 610
97 The situation with the XXV Army Corps to the north with the Vojussa on 7 March	"612
98 The situation with the VIII Army Corps on 7 March	" 614
99 The situation with the XXV Army Corps on 16 March	"633
100 The situation with the III Army Corps to mid January	" 650
101 The sector with Tomorreces valley at the end of January	"655
102 Plan of the operation "Chiesto"	" 661
103 The plan of offensive for the 9 th Army based on the talk Cavallero-Pirzio Biroli of 26 March	"664
104 Albanian defensive Organizational Alignment previewed from the P.R. (12 May 1941)	"671
105	
106 The alignment of the XVII Army Corps the 8 April	" 692
107 Situation in the Scutarino on 13 April	" 694
108 The sector of the XIV Corps on 5 April	" 697
109 The advance on Dibra (9-12 April)	" 703
110 The enemy alignments in Balcania on 6 April	" 713
111 The Anglo-Greek alignment on the P.D. of the Aliakmon	" 714
112 German offensive in Macedonian and the Greek defensive line	" 716
113 The situation in the sector of the Korçano on 3 April	" 723
114 The situation in the sector of Korçano on 11 April	" 728
115 Hypotheses on the Greek defensives intentions	" 731
116 The operations of the 9 th Army from 13 to 15 April	"733
117 The situation of the 9 th Army on 23 April	" 736
118 The operations of the 9 th Army from 7 to 23 April	"737

The Greek Campaign

ADAMI Ugo, 662, 800
 ALFIERI Dino, 33, 325, 331, 333, 512, 513.
 AME Cesare, 66, 646.
 ANGIOY Paolo, 622, 801.
 ANNONI Alessandro, 704, 705, 754.
 ARISIO Mario, 191, 225, 227, 240, 245,262, 267, 270, 341, 423, 648, 658, 659, 663, 725, 775, 781, 801.
 ARMELLINI Quirino, 35, 38, 39, 47, 61, 63-65 72 74 75 82 194 197 202, 308, 315, 318-321, 326, 771, 774, 785.
 AZZARO Giuseppe, 243, 270, 272.

 BADOGLIO Pietro, 17-22, 31, 33, 35, 38-40, 42, 43, 46, 47, 49, 55, 59-61, 63, 65, 66, 68-70, 72-75, 77-80, 82, 98, 113, 117-119, 191, 192, 194, 196-198, 202, 204, 207, 307, 310, 313-321, 326, 414, 771, 774, 784-786, 813.
 BAISTROCCHI Federico, 309, 772.
 BAKOPOULOS Konstantinos, 535, 538, 712, 715.
 BAKOS Gheorghios, 235, 540, 565, 623, 748,757,758.
 BALOCCO Riccardo, 702, 706.
 BANCALE Emilio, 191, 227, 270, 272, 280, 286, 287, 290, 291, 297, 301, 363, 365, 367, 372-374, 410, 411, 423, 428, 444,447,449,454,472,524,525,775, 788, 801.
 BARONE Giuseppe, 470.
 BARTIROMO Salvatore, 462, 499, 508.
 BASAKIDIS Panaghiotis, 235, 243.
 BATTISTI Emilio, 645, 662, 696, 702, 704, 800, 801.
 BENINI Zenone, 28, 30, 38, 44, 46, 47, 79, 81, 202.
 BERARDI Paolo, 407, 801,

The Greek Campaign

BERNOTTI Romeo, 19.
 BERTOTTI Emilio, 772.
 BIASUTTI Luigi Marzio, 623, 805.
 BIGLIA Albino, 456.
 BIGLINO Carlo, 644.
 BISMARCK Otto von, 82.
 BOEHME Hans von, 715.
 BOLLEA Ottavo, 445, 460, 801.
 BONINI Silvio, 227, 732, 800.
 BONZANI Alberto, 667.
 BORIS III, king of Bulgaria, 67, 78, 79, 117.
 BOTTAI Giuseppe, 476, 601.
 BOULALAS Cleantes, 560, 756.
 BRUSIĆ Ilja, 690.
 BUTTI Gino, 27.

 CADORNA Raffaele, 772.
 CAMPBELL Ronald Ian, 580, 581, 672, 710.
 CAMPINI Ugo, 270.
 CANEVARI Emilio, 570.
 CAPPÀ Ernesto, 333, 335, 786, 787.
 CARLA Vincenzo, 370, 453.
 CARTA Angelico, 445, 463, 466, 801.
 CAVAGNARI Domenico, 19, 73, 77, 78, 82, 191, 193.
 CAVALLERO Ugo, 269, 321, 326, 329-331, 333, 335, 339, 341, 350, 353, 354, 365, 395,
 396, 400, 401, 412, 414, 417, 419-425, 427, 429, 430, 433, 434, 436, 445-450, 453-455,
 462, 466, 468, 474, 476, 481-483, 485, 487-489, 491-495, 497, 499, 502, 504, 506, 508,
 510-512, 521, 524, 526, 527, 536, 537, 544, 547, 551-553, 555, 559, 569-573, 586, 587,
 589, 590, 593-595, 602, 604, 606-608, 617, 619, 623, 624, 626, 632, 634, 636, 638, 640,
 642, 644-647, 649, 653, 654,

The Greek Campaign

- 662, 675-682, 684, 685, 689, 692, 693, 695, 696, 700-702, 707, 708, 721, 722, 725, 727, 730, 761, 762, 764, 765, 767-769, 771, 773, 775, 786, 787, 789, 793.
- CHURCHILL Winston, 318, 514, 515, 575, 576, 580, 583, 584, 672, 673, 699.
- CIANETTI Tullio, 476, 601.
- CIANI Galeazzo, 12, 13, 24, 26, 28-31, 33-35, 37, 40, 44, 46, 59, 60, 64-66, 73-75, 80, 82, 103, 111, 194, 202, 204, 225, 249, 313-317, 321, 325, 331-333, 418, 424, 430, 474, 475, 477, 512, 570, 601, 763, 771.
- CIGLIANA Carlo, 250.
- CRIVARO Oreste, 603.
- CVETKOVIC Draga, 670, 672.
- DALADIER Edouard, 11.
- D'ALBIAC John Henry, 720.
- D'APINO Vincenzo, 173.
- D'APONTE Alberto, 544, 609, 801.
- DAVAKIS Constantinos, 153.
- DE AGAZIO Alberto, 644.
- DE BONO Emilio, 774. .
- DE CIA Amedeo, 353, 363, 365, 366, 374, 427, 461, 487, 542, 801.
- DEMESTIKAS Panagiotis, 235, 345, 565, 748, 757, 758.
- DE RENZI Edmondo, 370, 470, 472, 611, 631.
- DE STEFANIS Giuseppe, 454, 463, 602, 623, 707, 727, 730, 737, 800.
- DE VECCHI Cesare Maria, 29, 30. 118.
- D'HAVET Achille, 227, 280, 370, 373, 449, 801.
- DIAMANTI Filippo, 685.
- DIETHLE Eduard, 763.
- DIETRICH Joseph, 760, 766
- DILL John, 575, 580, 581, 710, 711.
- DIMARATOS Socrates, 235.
- DOVAS Konstantinos, 17.
- DRAKOS Marcos, 538, 565, 754, 755.
- DROMAZOS Gheorhios, 255, 346.
- EDEN Anthony, 575-583, 672, 683, 709-711.
- EGIZY Alfredo, 299.
- ESPOSITO Giovanni, 461, 606, 801.

The Greek Campaign

FALDELLA Emilio, 19, 60, 63.
 FARINACCI Roberto, 318-320, 601, 707, 813.
 FATUZZO Giacomo, 778.
 FAVAGROSSA Carlo, 74, 332, 431.
 FERONE Ernesto, 227, 700, 707, 725, 800.
 FERRERO Alberto 349 652 662 761, 763, 764, 766, 801.
 FORNARA Domernco, 239, 329, 502, 625, 628.
 FRANCESCHETTI Francesco, 623.
 FRANCO BAHAMONDE Francisco, 9, 82.
 FREYBERG Bernard, 712.

GABRIELLI Manlio, 64.
 GABUTTI Gualtiero, 122, 169, 227, 270, 800.
 GALBIATI Enzo, 428, 497.
 GAMBARA Gastone, 524, 525, 528, 542, 586, 588-590, 592, 593, 600, 604-608, 615, 617, 620, 622, 623, 626, 637, 641, 645, 748, 775, 788, 798, 801.
 GANDIN Antonio, 575.
 GELOSO Carlo, 16, 23, 24, 36, 45, 64, 97, 103, 104, 106, 108, 113, 114, 198, 204, 207, 208, 216, 223, 225-227, 239, 257, 274, 275, 279-282, 286, 287, 294, 296, 299-301, 303, 304, 306, 310, 321, 331, 333, 354, 364, 365, 373, 380, 394-397, 400, 401, 408, 411, 412, 418, 425, 426, 429, 433, 435, 436, 445, 446, 450, 454, 455, 460-462, 468, 469, 481-483, 491, 492, 495, 497, 499, 523-525, 527, 528, 542, 544, 547, 550, 552, 555, 568, 571, 572, 586, 587, 589, 590, 593-595, 600, 602, 605-607, 611, 613, 615-618, 620, 625, 626, 629, 632, 634, 636-638, 640, 642, 643, 652, 677, 678, 689, 744, 745, 759, 763, 763-766, 775, 777, 797, 801.
 GEORGANT AS Konstantinos, 235.
 GIANANI Mario, 805.
 GIANNI Giuseppe, 489, 603, 801.
 GIORGIO II, re degli Elleni, 577, 582, 760.
 GIROTTI Mario, 122, 178, 179, 181, 227, 287, 290, 366, 370; 427, 460, 558, 561, 562, 564, 801.

The Greek Campaign

GLORIA Alessandro, 302, 381, 481, 801.
 GOERING Hermann, 673.
 GRANDI Mario, 270.
 GRATTAROLA Giuseppe, 128, 227, 800.
 GRAZIANI Rodolfo 45, 61, 74, 75.
 GRAZZI Emanuele, 11, 12, 14, 28-30, 66, 67, 80, 81, 119.
 GRIGOROPOULOS Teodoros, 756, 757.
 GUIDETTI Federico, 695.
 GUIZZONI Alfredo, 13, 15, 17, 21-23, 36, 60, 61, 64, 97, 98, 101-103, 113, 319-321, 325, 333, 335, 412, 414-418, 437, 454, 499, 502, 510, 569, 607, 608, , 620, 638, 642, 646, 676, 679, 681, 687, 688, 696, 768, 769, 774, 781, 786, 787, 789.

 HITLER Adolf, 18, 21, 30, 59, 82, 313-316, 318, 325, 332, 503-505, 507, 513, 578, 605, 606, 620, 672-676, 679, 688, 699, 701, 763.
 HORTHY Nicolas, 674.

 ISMAY H. Lionel, 514.

 JACOE Vincenzo, 695.
 JACOMONI DI SAN SAVINO Francesco, 24, 28, 30, 31, 33, 34, 38, 44, 46, 64-67, 69, 79, 202-205, 315, 586, 685, 707, 764, 771, 785.
 JANKOVIC Radivoje, 681, 711.
 JODL Alfred, 507, 513, 673, 701, 766, 769.
 JODL Ferdinand, 507, 508.

 KAIS Anastasios, 235.
 KATSIMITROS Csaralampos, 10, 153, 169, 170, 235, 540.
 KEITEL Wilhelm, 83, 313-315, 504, 507, 513, 569, 645, 673.
 KEYWOOD Thomas George, 581.
 KITSOS Cristos, 235, 239.
 KORYZIS Alexandros, 577, 578, 581, 709.
 KOSMAS Cheorghios, 243, 254, 255, 345, 390, 397, 565, 755.

The Greek Campaign

KOTOULAS Ionnes, 538, 712. .
 KRSTIC Dusan, 705.

 LABDAS Gheorghios, 235, 407, 560.
 LAMA Guido, 603.
 LIST Wilhelm, 687, 700, 716, 727, 758, 760, 761, 763.
 LJUBAS Nicolas, 162.
 LONGOMORE Arthur, 516.

 MACKENSEN Hans George von, 82, 314, 315, 675, 763.
 MAGLI Giovanni, 122, 227, 404, 481, 636, 676, 801.
 MARCA Carlo, 805
 MARFUGGI Ugo, 204, 227:
 MARIOTTI Adamo, 349, 396, 493, 801.
 MAZARAKIS Alexandros, 720, 758.'
 MAZZA Mario, 706, 805.
 MAZZINI Luigi, 801.
 MELLANO Pietro, 632.
 MELOTTI Carlo, 494, 497, 801. .
 MERCALLI Camillo, 430, 433, 445, 450, 451, 453, 454, 456, 460, 461, 463, 469, 470, 528,
 529, 597-600, 604, 605, 609, 610, 624, 630, 632, 739, 745, 781, 801.
 MESSE Giovanni, 204, 395, 398, 401, 418, 495, 499, 625, 626, 630, 632, 638, 739, 745, 781,
 801.
 METAXAS Agamennon, 153, 235, 239.
 METAXAS Ioannis, 9, 11-14, 28, 29, 72, 80-82, 144, 308, 336, 489, 517-519, 548.
 MIRKOVIC Bora, 673.
 MONDINI Luigi, 13, 14, 16, 28, 41, 81.
 MONT ANAiu Mario, 21, 772.
 MONTI Edoardo, 319.
 MORIGI Giorgio, 735.
 MUSSOLINI Benito, 10, 13, 14, 16-22, 24, 30-40, 55, 59-62, 66-68, 70, 73-82, 101, 111, 113,
 114, 119, 120, 191-198, 201, 202, 204-208, 223, 226, 251, 253, 307, 308, 313, 314, 316-
 318, 320- 321, 325, 326, 330, 332, 333, 340, 350, 376, 396, 402, 413, 415, 417-426, 429-
 431, 434, 436, 437, 441, 446, 449, 452, 453, 455, 462, 466, 467, 474, 478, 482--485,
 487,488,498,499,502-506,509-512,

The Greek Campaign

521, 523, 527, 548, 551, 553, 555, 569, 570, 572, 573, 600-602, 604, 606-608, 616, 617, 620, 623-638, 644, 645, 651, 662, 672, 674, 676, 678-680, 682, 683, 687, 688, 692, 693, 695, 701, 702, 707, 722, 763, 768, 773-775, 779, 784-786, 788.

MUTUSIS Soterios, 243, 262.

NALDI Adolfo, 128, 227, 800.

NASCI Gabriele, 115, 128, 188, 189, 199, 210, 223, 227, 236, 238-240, 243, 245, 249, 254, 257, 318, 348, 352-354, 423, 630, 651-654, 657, 662, 690, 696, 698, 700, 702, 704, 706, 708, 721, 724, 726, 732, 775, 781, 800.

NAVARINI Enea, 763, 801.

NEGRI Paride, 705, 801.

NEGRO Matteo, 37, 335, 603, 622, 801.

OLLEARO Alfonso, 489, 619, 801.

PAFUNDI Giuseppe, 684, 688, 689, 690, 693, 781, 801.

PALAIRET Charles, 583, 720.

PAOLO Diadoco di Grecia, 578, 672, 754.

PAPADIMAS Iphipurgos, 757.

PAPADOPOULOS Demetrios, 162, 176, 235, 275, 277, 363, 364, 441, 565, 755.

PAPAGOS Alexandros, 13, 16, 138, 144, 176, 253, 261, 336, 337, 341, 410, 441, 513, 516-518, 534, 538, 565, 566, 579, 581-583, 709-711, 715-718, 720, 722, 724, 725, 730, 743, 748, 756, 759, 761.

PAPANIKOLAOS Alexandros, 10.

PAPASTERGHIOU Gheorghios, 243, 560.

PARIANI Alberto, 16, 22, 36, 60, 61, 64, 97, 98, 102, 103, 113, 309, 669, 772, 780-782, 784.

PARINI Piero, 457.

PAVOLINI Alessandro, 315, 316.

PEDRAZZOLI Gino, 800.

PENTIMALLI Riccardo, 693, 695, 801.

PERALDO Primo, 632, 764.

The Greek Campaign

PERTUGI Giulio, 393, 394, 398, 800.
 PETAIN Philippe, 82.
 PIAZZONI Alessandro, 396, 493, 801.
 PIETRO II, re di Jugoslavia, 646.
 PINTOR Pietro, 318,319.
 PIRZIO BIROLI Alessandro, 602, 604, 620, 630, 631, 643, 644, 649, 659, 660, 662, 663, 696, 698, 700, 721, 724, 727, 729, 730, 732, 744, 759, 761, 775, 801.
 PITSIKAS Ioannes, 153, 230, 231, 233, 235, 238, 254, 255, 261, 538, 565, 712, 718, 730, 744, 754-759, 761.
 PIVANO Angelo, 463, 528, 801.
 PIZZI Enrico, 373.
 PIZZOLATO Gavino, 603, 636, 686, 693,801.
 POLITIS Jean, 27, 28, 151
 POPOVIC Krsta, 695.
 POUSOPOULOS Anastasios, 560.
 PRICOLA Francesco, 46, 47, 73, 77, 82, 191, 193, 194, 196, 199,214,254, 325 - 327 436, 476, 478, 586, 617, 620, 635, 679
 PSARO Rodolfo, 365, 805.
 PUNTONI Paolo, 315,321.

 RANZA Ferruccio, 24, 64, 65, 80, 130, 189, 191, 215, 227, 254, 416, 435, 436, 510, 678.
 RAZIS Gheorghlos, 239, 242.
 REISOLI-MATHIEU Gustavo, 568, 801.
 REVERBERI Luigi, 659.
 RIBBENTROP Joachim, von, 33-35, 82, 313,673.
 RICAGNO Umberto, 700, 771.
 RICCI Renato, 471, 601.
 RINTELEN Enno, von, 82, 83, 418, 506, 507, 510, 575, 636, 674, 675, 679, 681, 686, 687, 700, 764, 768.
 RIVOLTA Carlo, 116, 119, 122, 170, 492, 682.
 ROATTA Mario, 26, 34, 37, 38, 41-43, 48, 55, 58, 60-66, 69, 71-73, 75-77, 83, 108, 109, 111, 113, 191, 192, 195, 197, 202, 203, 207, 239, 301, 309, 317, 324, 416, 418, 430, 617, 622, 781, 789.
 ROSSI Carlo, 115, 122, 160, 163, 165, 168, 210, 227, 229, 275, 286, 302, 333, 380, 382, 386, 402, 404, 407, 452, 455, 478, 479, 481, 483, 485, 489, 491, 524, 531, 534, 542, 544, 547, 550, 552, 554,

The Greek Campaign

556, 565, 568, 600, 605, 611, 616, 632, 637, 775, 787, 800.
 ROSSI Francesco, 31, 37, 38, 51, 58, 77, 211.
 ROSSI PASSAVANTI Elia, 476.
 RUGGERO Vittorio, 487.
 RUGGERO Giunio, 658, 801.

SAKELLARIN Alexandros, 759.
 SANTORO Giuseppe, 47, 219, 214.
 SANTOVITO Ugo, 226, 229, 254, 348, 353, 698, 801.
 SCALAMANDRE Giuseppe, 805.
 SCATTINI Arturo, 28, 30, 250, 626.
 SCHULENBURG Friedrich Werner, von, 675.
 SCLAVO Francesco, 381.
 SCOGNAMIGLIO Guglielmo, 805.
 SCRUGLI Napoleone, 343.
 SCUERO Antonio, 227, 301, 333, 526, 646, 685.
 SERENA Adelchi, 570.
 SERRANO SUNER Ramon, 313
 SIMOVIC Dusan, 138, 646, 672, 692, 699, 710, 711.
 SODDU Ubaldo, 22, 23, 26, 31, 33, 38-40, 43, 53-55, 60, 63, 65, 66, 72-76, 81, 88, 101, 111, 114, 116, 189, 191-194, 196-204, 206, 208, 210, 215, 219, 221, 222, 225-228, 239, 241, 245, 246, 249-251, 253, 258, 261, 262, 267, 269, 274, 277, 280, 294, 297, 300, 301, 304, 307-311, 313, 316, 317, 319, 321-323, 325, 326, 329, 331, 332, 336, 338, 339, 341, 348-353, 394-397, 412, 413, 416, 417, 419, 421, 423-425, 427, 429, 437, 647, 771, 774, 777, 781, 782, 784, 786, 799, 813.
 SOLINAS Gioacchino, 269.
 SORICE Antonio, 204, 208, 309, 317, 320, 332, 427, 429, 786, 813.
 SPATH Hans, 681, 686.
 SPICACCI Guglielmo, 462, 614, 700.
 SPORTIELLO Ettore, 227, 333.
 STARACE Achille, 335, 416, 498, 601, 707, 785.
 STERGHIOPOULOS Leonidas, 235.
 STOJADINOVIC Milan, 675.
 STUMME Georg, 700.
 SYROS Spiridion, 764.

TAVONI Gaetano, 173, 447, 805.
 TELEKI Deszesz Pal, 674.
 TELLERA Giuseppe, 667.
 TELLINI Enrico, 9, 157.
 TRABUCCHI Alessandro, 644.
 TRIONFI Luigi, 383, 385, 801.
 TRIZIO Felice, 307, 805.
 TSOLAKOGLU Gheorghlos, 231, 233, 235, 238, 242, 245, 262, 275, 341, 565, 712, 715, 716, 718, 722, 724-726, 748, 755, 757-761, 764, 766, 768.
 TUR Vittorio, 117.
 TURLE C.E., 720.

VALLE Giuseppe, 213.
 VECCHI Giovanni, 684, 690, 696, 801.
 VERCELLINO Mario, 198, 204, 210, 219, 225, 227, 236, 240, 243, 245-247, 251, 254, 257, 258, 262, 265, 267, 269, 304, 310, 330, 338, 339, 341, 345, 349, 353, 354, 427, 488, 489, 510, 646-649, 651, 653, 654, 659, 775, 781, 801.

The Greek Campaign

VISCONTI PRASCA Sebastiano, 26 30-33, 37-40, 42-44, 48-50, 60, 63-72, 76, 77, 79-81, 83, 88, 103, 108, 109, 111 - 120, 128, 130, 159, 163, 168, 181, 191 - 193, 195-205, 208, 210, 212, 215, 219, 221-223, 270, 272, 274, 315, 423, 719, 771, 772, 781, 784, 785, 813.

VLAHOS Konstantinos, 764

VRACHNOS Basileos, 176, 235.

WAVELL Archibald, 514-518, 575, 576, 580, 582, 720, 757, 758.

WEST Ferdinand, 678.

WEYGAND Maxime, 17.

WILSON Henry Mitland, 582, 710-712, 715, 718, 720, 756.

ZACCO Luigi, 249, 805.

ZACCONE Mario, 227, 801.

ZANI Francesco, 695, 801.

ZANNINI Licurgo, 122, 227, 269, 283, 286.

ZIGOURIS Crestos, 153, 235, 239.

ZINGALES Francesco, 696.

ZOGU I Ahmed, re d'Albania, 10, 225.

The Greek Campaign

Alessandropoli, 132, 139, 233.
 Alessio, 682, 693.
 Aliakmon (anche Vistritsa), 139, 143, 148, 172, 304, 579, 580, 583, 710, 712, 717, 719, 720, 730, 756.
 Ambum f., 361, 365, 366, 438, 444, 745.
 Ankara, 17, 144, 578, 580.
 Aoo f., 150, 171, 178, 179, 181, 182, 740.
 Arachtos f., 106, 139, 148.
 Arena m., 171, 172, 187.
 Argirocastro, 67, 86, 92, 129, 202, 211, 228, 234, 260, 261, 282, 294, 299-301, 306, 321, 336, 377, 380, 390, 421, 549, 741, 746.
 Arza, 70, 71, 76, 85, 89, 90, 106, 108, 109, 113, 117, 120, 122, 193, 195, 196, 308, 768.
 Arta di Mezzo, 491, 492, 531, 534, 540, 542, 544, 590.
 Arza di Sopra, 492, 531, 540, 542, 551, 595, 600, 611, 637.
 Atene, 10, 11, 13, 27-30, 41, 68, 70-73, 76, 79-83, 89, 90, 92, 113, 117, 119, 121, 136, 138, 139, 143, 151, 195, 440, 454, 506, 513, 516, 518, 577, 581-583, 709, 711, 715, 754-756, 761.

 Bali, 588, 590, 592.
 Barazani, ponti di, 230.
 Bari, 226, 324, 352, 355, 416, 417, 521, 652.
 Belgrado, 138, 191, 578, 580, 645, 665, 670, 674, 699, 710, 711.
 Bençe, 381, 386, 404, 438, 753.
 Bençes t., 381, 385, 386, 390, 404, 406, 479, 482, 531, 552, 568.
 Berat, 49, 86, 89, 90, 92, 217, 225, 261, 274, 279, 281, 282, 291, 297, 299, 303, 357, 353, 359, 363, 365, 372, 374, 398, 415, 422, 425, 430, 433, 439, 441, 442, 445, 450, 453, 454, 458, 461, 463, 466, 478, 483, 488-491, 499, 512, 513, 524, 533, 537, 548, 549, 553, 559, 568, 586, 588, 594, 596, 630, 636, 649, 660, 675, 677, 682, 711, 718, 724, 740, 774, 795.
 Bilisthti, 183, 187-189, 236, 239, 440, 643-645, 665, 707, 719, 721, 726, 727, 729, 730, 734, 805.
 Bitolj (anche Monastir), 510, 645, 669, 707, 708, 712, 715, 717, 718.
 Bojana f., 667, 684, 686, 688, 689.
 Borova m., 216, 732, 735, 748, 805.
 Borshi, 281, 282, 309, 378, 390, 392.
 Bozhigradi, 183, 216, 239.
 Brataj, 400, 401, 426.
 Bregu Bari Kugit, 262, 290, 321.
 Bregu Dragotin, 265, 267.
 Bregu Gliulei, 454, 466, 468-470, 472, 528-530, 590, 592, 595, 598, 609, 611, 632, 645, 745.
 Bregu Kemerit, 262, 264.
 Bregu Macullit, 267, 238.
 Bregu i Brezavet, 265, 340.
 Bregu i Math, 254, 350, 353, 647, 653, 724.
 Bregu i Rapit, 472, 613, 615, 617, 622, 623, 636, 641.
 Bregu i Shalesit, 462, 472, 524, 525, 528, 588, 600, 645, 805.
 Bregu i Valasit, 456, 470.
 Brindisi, 194, 199, 202, 214, 217, 417, 494.
 Bubesi, 454, 472, 600.
 Bulçari, 349.
 Bunzani, 682.
 Bureto m., 302, 303, 307, 323, 375, 749.
 Butrinto, 275, 292, 717, 719, 744.

 Cangoni, 242, 250, 255.
 Cattaro, 693, 695.
 Cefalonia, 46, 78, 83, 117, 118, 195, 197, 618.
 Cerevode, 332, 346, 349, 353, 365, 366, 368, 501, 410, 426, 730, 745.
 Cetinje, 695.

The Greek Campaign

Corfù, 9-11, 22, 31, 42, 45, 46, 61, 62, 76-78, 81, 83, 97, 98, 104, 106, 108, 113, 117, 118, 129, 192, 193, 195, 196, 200, 330.
 Corinto, 106, 117, 208.
 Creta, 83, 132, 506.
 Çuka e Fecit, 450, 451, 452, 460.
 Çuka e Gjae, 349, 352, 353, 656.
 Çuka e Greves, 348, 805.
 Çuka e Liqerit, 348, 805.

Dardhe, 236, 238, 239, 242, 249, 255, 740.
 Delvinaki 94, 143, 159, 283, 286, 292, 753.
 Delvino, 44, 48, 49, 86, 155, 162, 260, 300, 301, 303, 306, 321, 336, 337, 376, 747, 753.
 Dervicanti, 199, 270, 302, 754.
 Deshniçes f., 349, 359, 361, 366, 425, 444, 452, 456, 458, 461-463, 481-483, 485, 487, 491, 523, 525, 530, 534, 540, 554, 558, 565, 585, 586, 588, 589, 592, 594, 595, 602, 607-609, 613, 616-618, 630, 635, 637, 642, 647, 660, 662, 665, 670, 679, 742, 746, 766, 775.
 Devoli f., 86, 92, 146, 183, 216, 225, 236, 240-242, 254, 255, 261, 265, 274, 280, 281, 323, 338, 340, 343, 345, 349, 350, 353, 359, 461, 489, 555, 569, 626, 634, 640, 641, 651, 652, 654, 656-658, 660, 662, 663, 698, 722, 730, 740.
 Dhembel m., 297, 303, 354, 370.
 Dhrinos f., 44, 86, 92, 109, 141, 155, 219, 260, 283, 294, 297, 301-303, - 307, 34, 359, 372, 375-378, 387, 389, 406, 407, 412, 415, 433, 442, 456, 479, 491, 531, 538, 547, 549, 553, 558, 560, 562, 565, 566, 608, 645, 742-744, 746, 748, 749, 753, 763.
 Dibra, 85, 680, 683, 684, 696, 698, 700, 702, 704-708, 711, 722, 724, 726, 727.
 Distraton, 178, 179, 181, 182, 275.
 Dobrusha, 337, 408.
 Doliana, 160, 193, 805.
 Dragoti, 94, 378, 481, 533, 555, 556, 558, 559, 562, 563, 569, 564, 567, 568, 589, 634.
 Drenova, 129, 130, 245, 246, 249, 252.
 Drin f., 98, 184, 686-689, 692, 693, 696, 698, 702, 704, 705, 709.
 Durazzo, 27, 67, 70, 75, 77, 85, 86, 88-90, 92, 102, 129, 146, 195, 199, 202, 217, 226, 228, 274, 296, 311, 324, 330, 333, 335, 349, 352, 437, 488, 508, 667, 669, 670, 676, 687, 692, 724, 775, 794, 795.
 Dushari, 346, 805.

Edessa, 98, 121, 155, 642, 643, 644, 679, 712.
 Elbasan, 86, 90, 92, 102, 217, 257, 260, 263, 330, 340, 345, 422, 425, 439, 481, 569, 620, 646, 653, 654, 658, 711, 718, 722, 724, 725, 740.
 Elea (anche Kalibaki), 143, 150, 153, 169, 170, 176.
 Eleftenon, 178, 181.
 Eptachorion, 176, 719.
 Erseke, 44, 48, 86, 92, 103, 104, 148, 150, 172, 182, 200, 212, 219, 221, 223, 225, 226, 230, 234, 236, 238, 239, 243, 247, 255, 261, 270, 272, 275, 277, 279, 280, 287, 291, 358, 440, 729, 730, 732, 737, 745, 746, 748, 756, 775, 805.

Fieri, 283, 365, 378, 395, 400, 413, 439, 450, 454, 482, 499, 544, 569, 740, 741.
 Filiates, 130, 143, 162.
 Filippiade, 120, 162.
 Fitoki, 160, 276.
 Florina, 11, 86, 89, 98, 113, 121, 146, 183, 216, 243, 260, 337, 398, 440, 505, 508, 510, 538, 582, 642-645, 707, 708, 715, 718, 726, 729, 730, 734.

The Greek Campaign

Frasheri, 257, 291, 303, 337, 363, 364, 730.
 Frastani, 157, 487.
 Furka 171 175 178.

Gamila m., 121, 150.
 Gianina Ganina), 79, 83, 86, 89, 90, 92, 98, 103, 104, 108, 109, 112, 120, 122,
 132, 141, 143, 146, 147, 150, 160, 165, 168, 175, 202, 221, 230, 234, 260, 337, 375, 377,
 397, 427, 720, 729, 734, 755, 758, 759, 764, 768, 769.
 Gjormi, 387, 500.
 Gllava, 528, 616, 617, 740, 741, 747.
 Golemi, 381, 383, 397, 433, 434, 481, 495, 625, 742.
 Golloborda, 247, 255, 262.
 Gormos f., 160, 272, 283
 Gostanghes, 269, 343, 346, 349, 350, 353, 363-365, 374.
 Gostlvar, 692, 700, 725.
 Grammos m., 86, 92, 121, 128, 148, 171, 183, 187, 231, 233, 236, 252, 254, 275, 719, 735.
 Gramshi, 88, 102, 265, 322, 343, 352, 415, 433, 653, 654.
 Gremja m., 186, 187.
 Grevena, 230, 243, 719.
 Groppa m., 468, 481, 483, 485, 487, 489, 492, 533, 544, 556, 588, 746.
 Grottaglie, 191, 193, 194.
 Guri i Bardhe, 108.
 Guri i Llenges, 340.
 Guri i Prer, 442, 805.
 Guri i Regjanit, 251, 258, 264, 265, 267.
 Guri i Topit, 630, 656, 658, 659, 660, 663, 722, 805.
 Gusmara, 381, 385, 386, 390, 401.

Han, 348, 651, 652.
 Hani Balaban, 450, 463, 588.
 Hani Bubeslt, 463.
 Hani Delvinaki, 159, 161, 168, 375, 763.
 Hani Dseravinas, 161.
 Hani i Hotit, 690, 692, 695.
 Himara, 86, 92, 94, 393, 395, 398, 497.
 Hoçisht, 216, 236, 242, 243, 249.
 Hormova, 380, 549.

Igoumenitsa, 109, 163, 200, 203, 225, 764, 768.
 Il Cairo, 517, 575, 576.

Jergucat (Giorgucat), 86, 260, 261, 274, 275, 280, 306, 354..
 Kajca, 449, 452, 460.
 Kakavia, 86, 153, 157, 159, 260, 269, 286, 294, 302, 336, 337, 375, 376, 742, 749, 753, 762,
 766.
 Kaimaktsalan m., 130, 580, 712, 715.
 Kalamas f., 86, 98, 103, 121, 130, 141, 143, 148, 150, 153, 159-163, 165, 169, 170, 176, 199-
 201, 203, 216, 219, 221, 222, 226, 234, 270, 272, 283, 408, 468, 719, 744, 805.
 Kalibaki, 86, 89, 103, 109, 120-122, 125, 130, 143, 153, 157, 159-161, 165, 168, 169, 200,
 201, 209, 210, 216, 221-223, 261, 375, 440, 637, 729, 730, 732, 734, 742, 747, 775.
 Kallarat, 395, 497.

The Greek Campaign

Kamia m., 240, 262, 265, 269, 274, 280, 281, 338, 340, 341, 398, 421, 607, 724.
 Kapestica (Kapestitsa), 98, 183, 186, 187, 216, 239, 254, 732, 734.
 Kastaniani, 173, 272, 377.
 Kastoria, 86, 98, 113, 121, 130, 141, 146, 155, 182, 216, 230, 231, 241, 243, 719, 748.
 Kavala, 132, 579.
 Kenali, 711, 722.
 Kerasovo, 182, 377.
 Krcovo, 692, 701, 704.
 Kleftis m., 179, 182, 277.
 Klisura, 40, 86, 92, 94, 280-282, 290, 296, 297, 299-301, 306, 325, 331, 332, 337, 349, 353,
 355, 357, 359, 361, 363, 365, 370, 372-374, 400, 401, 406, 408, 410-412, 417, 421-425,
 428, 442, 444-446, 450, 452-455, 461, 469, 475, 478, 481-483, 485, 487-492, 500, 508,
 512, 523, 524, 533, 534, 537, 538, 545, 556, 558, 565, 570, 586, 588-592, 594, 595, 600,
 608, 620, 627, 628, 634, 670, 719, 740-742, 746, 747, 753, 756, 774.
 Kodra, 559, 563, 564, 565.
 Kollak, 722, 725.
 Konispoli, 86, 92, 94, 109, 111, 162, 163, 212, 747.
 Kopliku, 690, (>93).
 Konitsa, 121, 172, 173, 176, 179, 181, 182, 200, 201, 203,
 221, 222, 225, 230, 234, 270, 272, 274, 275, 277, 337, 719, 734, 735, 753.
 Korça (Koritza, Corizza), 13, 24, 44, 48, 86, 88, 92, 98, 101-103, 108, 115, 119, 121, 125, 143,
 148, 150, 182, 186, 187, 189, 191, 194, 196-199, 201, 202, 206, 212, 216, 217, 219, 221,
 226, 228, 230, 231, 233, 234, 236, 241, 243, 245-247, 250-252, 255, 257, 258, 260, 261,
 275, 277, 283, 287, 311, 336, 337, 341, 359, 398, 415, 421, 440-442, 482, 508, 509, 607,
 627, 643, 644, 651, 660, 662, 663, 670, 707, 717, 727, 730, 732, 744, 750, 762, 775.
 Kozane, 11, 85, 155, 243, 509, 719.
 Krioneri, 157, 159.
 Kruja, 437, 670, 683, 696, 711.
 Kualibardhe, 269.
 Kuçi, 378, 387, 394, 497, 627.
 Kukes (in val Drin), 98, 670, 680, 682, 690, 692, 693, 696, 711, 722, 724.
 Kukes (in val Skumbini), 265, 270, 722, 280.
 Kundreviça m., 478, 479, 530, 531.
 Kunverlesh m., 281, 282, 299, 303, 337, 354, 355, 359, 372, 378, 380, 381, 383, 386, 390, 392,
 402, 406, 407, 412, 415, 417, 418, 427, 430, 433, 442, 446, 473, 482, 495, 499, 547, 559,
 686, 742, 744.

 Lakanokastro, 157, 159, 283.
 Larissa, 89, 90, 92, 132, 155, 438, 440, 508, 09, 510, 579, 726, 760, 761, 763.
 Lekdushaj, 381, 383, 385, 386, 390, 402, 442, 531, 547, 567, 568.
 Lekeli, 407, 533, 805.
 Lem Giaferit, 267, 338.
 Lemnusha, 350, 647, 653.
 Lengatica t., 264, 279, 280, 282, 290.
 Leskoviku, 48, 86, 103, 148, 150, 182, 200, 234, 236, 243, 261, 270, 272, 274, 275, 277, 280,
 291, 734, 735, 737, 744, 749.
 Libohovo, 215, 299, 302, 479.
 Librazhd, 98, 108, 265, 325, 332, 345, 349, 439, 670, 676, 681-683, 690, 692, 696, 700, 702,
 705, 708, 722, 724, 726.
 Lin, 103, 257.
 Llenge, 338, 660, 722.

The Greek Campaign

Lofka m., 242, 255.
 Lomnica f., 280, 409, 592.
 Luftinja t., 523, 538, 542, 548.
 Lunxheries m., 297.
 Lushnja, 439.
 Luzati, 387, 540.

Maja Beikes, 406, 495.
 Maja Besh,ishtit, 531, 556, 562, 563, 565- 567,611,634,686.
 Maja Cikes, 396, 494, '500.
 Maja Faqiakut, 264, 304.
 Maja Messimerit, 493, 500, 535.
 Maja Papathia, 394.
 Maja Vashes, 234, 734.
 Maja Velushes, 251, 257, 269, 290, 303, 338, 349, 354, 363.
 Maja Vrumbullake, 242, 245.
 Maja e Korbiet, 353, 656.
 Maja e Lepietres, 400, 495.
 Maja e Mietes, 256, 346, 660.
 Maja e T artarit, 426.
 Maja e Qeparoit, 378, 390, 393.
 Makrikambos m., 275, 282, 292, 294.
 Mali Brezhanit, 372, 373, 407, 452, 481, 483, 485, 487, 489, 533, 547, 556, 565.
 Mali Bus Devrit, 372, 378, 380, 382, 386, 390, 397, 402, 407, 481, 531, 686.
 Mali Corajt, 378, 390, 397.
 Mali Corap, 462.
 Mali Creshoves, 364.
 Mali Golico, 303, 359, 372, 373, 378, 380, 387, 406, 407, 483, 531, 538, 545, 547, 549, 550,
 554-556, 558, 560, 562-567, 600, 611, 616, 627, 634, 677, 686, 805.
 Mali Hormova, 372, 380, 387, 406, 407, 547, 548, 550.
 Mali Ivanit, 183, 187, 236, 238, 242, 255, 261, 660.
 Mali Komarit, 613, 615.
 Mali Rosica, 340, 341, 345, 648, 658, 660, 663, 726.
 Mali Kulmakes, 348, 353, 401, 442.
 Mali Macicak, 265, 338, 340.
 Mali Nishites, 592, 599
 Mali Palcies, 372, 386-389, 401, 404, 407, 478, 531.
 Mali Qarishta (Kjarista), 281, 282, 299, 303, 355, 357, 361, 363, 364, 366, 408, 425, 444, 450,
 458, 461.
 Mali Qarishta e Fratarit, 337, 358, 364, 366, 368, 370, 373, 374, 401, 409-411, 423, 430, 446,
 449, 592, 594, 649.
 Mali Qelqes, 303, 364.
 Mali Qishes, 390, 394.
 Mali Sareces, 267, 338.
 Mali Shendeli, 299, 492, 531, 538, 540, 542, 544, 545, 548-556, 558, 559, 563-567, 589, 590,
 592, 593, 595, 615, 627, 629, 630, 642, 645, 686,805.
 Mali Shpat, 378, 383.
 Mali Sogor, 340, 348.
 Mali Spadarit, 461, 469, 528-530, 595, 598, 609, 611, 615, 624, 630, 632, 639, 643, 645, 740,
 745,
 Mali Radomit, 281, 290, 337, 363,

The Greek Campaign

Mali Tabajan, 450-452, 460, 461, 469,
 Mali Taronine, 363,442, 447, 449, 451, 452,460.
 Mali Tersorit, 389, 406.
 Mali That, 378, 380, 381, 383, 385, 386, 393, 395, 397, 402, 481.
 Mali Tomor (Tomori), 240, 325, 349, 355, 357, 363, 434, 440, 444, 456, 458, 463, 528, 641,
 647, 649, 651, 653, 656, 658, 663, 724, 726, 739, 744-746.
 Mali Topajanit, 365, 411, 442, 444-447, 449, 452, 458, 636.
 Mali Trebeshines, 299, 355, 363, 373, 408, 444,452,454,456,461,468-470,472, 474, 481-483,
 487, 489, 490, 492, 524, 527, 530, 531, 533, 537, 540, 545, 549-551, 555, 558, 562, 565,
 586-590, 592, 593, 595, 609, 611, 613, 618-621, 623, 634, 637, 640, 642, 742, 746, 756.
 Mali Trepelit, 454, 456, 458, 461, 463, 470,528.
 Mali e Varit, 392, 393, 394.
 Mali i Çipes, 343, 346, 660.
 Mali i Gjer, 260, 377.
 Mali i Komianit, 352.
 Mali i Papatit, 352, 647, 815.
 Mali i Lenijes, 240, 256, 338.
 Mali i Thate, 128, 183, 730.
 Malig 234, 241, 255, 258, 261, 660, 730.
 Maqellara, 702, 704.
 Margarition (Margaritio), 170, 221.
 Mati f., 667, 669.
 Mavripetra, 172.
 Mavrova 483 487 500 549 559 616
 Meli ssopetra, 234.
 Mezgorazni, 481, 485, 538, 545, 550, 554, 556, 558, 562, 589, 626.
 Mezgoranit t., 474, 492, 531, 53, 540,
 Mesovoum, 157, 160.
 Metsovo, 89, 90, 103, 109, 112, 120-122, 130, 131, 144, 148, 150, 155, 165, 171-173, 175, 181,
 182, 187, 216, 230, 377, 748, 756, 758, 760, 762.
 Miloti, 24, 98, 670, 693,
 Missolungi, 36, 76, 90, 103, 106, 113, 195, 720, 729, 768,
 Maliq, 234, 241, 255, 258, 261, 660, 730,
 Monastir (anche Bitolj), 83, 89, 741, 765.
 Monastero (di Bubesi), 589, 616, 617, 623, 624, 644.
 Morova m., 86, 97, 128, 148, 150, 183, 199, 231, 233, 234, 238, 242, 243, 245, 247, 249, 250,
 252, 254, 255, 261, 440, 660, 805.
 Mureve m., 395, 400, 406, 494, 495.
 Muric;caj, 491, 492, 530, 531, 540, 542, 545, 565, 637.
 Murzines, 86.

 Nauplia, 119, 155.
 Negrades, 153, 159-161,
 Nemerçke m., 260, 290, 297, 355, 357.
 Nestos, 139, 579.
 Nestorion, 233, 243.
 Nestrami, 130.

 Ohrid, 119, 261, 262, 647, 663, 669, 676, 682, 684, 690, 692, 698, 707, 708, 718, 721, 722,
 726, 727, 805.
 Olimpo m" 519, 580, 717, 718, 719, 730,

The Greek Campaign

Ostravica m., 264, 357, 358, 364,
 Ostravice, 225, 240, 241, 264, 281, 282, 304, .340, 363, 440.
 Ostrenit m., 704-706.
 Osum f., 261, 279, 282, 283, 290, 291, 296, 297, 304, 306, 323, 336, 337, 345, 349, 357, 359,
 361, 363-366, 374, 401, 408, 410-412, 415, 425-427, 433, 438, 440, 444, 445, 450, 453,
 454, 456, 458, .
 461-463, 468, 470, 529, 537, 595, 598, 641, 651, 724, 739, 742, 744, 745.
 Pades, 178, 179, 181.
 Paliokastro, 157, 160, 165, 354.
 Paraboar, 463, 470,540,602.
 Paramitia, 108, 111, 163, 203, 221.
 Pasina Livada, 702, 704.
 Patrasso, 83, 103, 106, 119, 155, 768.
 Pavla t., 303.
 Perati, 86, 103, 109, 153, 157, 159, 203, 234, 269, 270, 272, 274, 279, 280, 287, 290, 336, 440,
 441, 449, 717, 720, 730, 732, 734, 735, 742, 744, 747-749, 753, 762, 764, 766, 805.
 Pesclani, 407, 538, 547, 549, 550, 552-554.
 Peshkopie (sudest lago' Ohrida), 241.
 Pishkopije (alta valle Drin Nero), 682, 683, 692, 696, 698, 702, 704, 721.
 Piluri, 392, 497.
 Pindo, 139, 147, 148, 151, 152, 165, 170, 172, 175, 176, 181, 186, 187, 206, 229, 230, 260,
 270, 280, 311, 408, 449, 680, 717, 719, 720, 730, 735, 748, 758, 766, 768, 805.
 Piquerasi, 354, 390, 497, 498.
 Pireo, 61, 83, 89, 90, 136.
 Pixos, 18.7, 231.
 Pleu i Kleve, 265, 266.
 Podgoria, 247, 257.
 Podgonca, 667, 682, 687, 695, 711.
 Pogradec, 44, 103, 109, 240, 241, 243, 245, 247, 249, 251, 255, 257, 261, 262, 264, 274, 280,
 301, 323, 332, 338, 440, 507,643,663, 677, 7~4, 726, 741.
 Porto Edda (anche Santi Quaranta), 76, 195, 212, 280, 294, 301, 306, 747.
 Porto Palermo, 299, 300, 306, 325, 332, 349, 354, 417, 418, 425, 434, 627, 746, 747.
 Premeti, 92, 150, 182, 212, 260, 261, 270, 279, 282, 291, 294, 297, 299-301, 308, 323, 363,
 490, 508, 538, 589, 607, 714, 746.
 Prespa (lago Piccolo), 128, 186, 187, 225, 236, 734.
 Prespa (lago Grande), 669, 707, 727.
 Preveza, 67, 68, 70, 73, 90, 109, 111, 120,
 129, 147, 153, 162, 192, 193, 196-198, 208, 260, 308, 330, 428, 608, 720, 730, 768.
 Prilep, 85, 701.
 Prizren, 692, 711.
 Progonat, 381-385, 390, 401, 407, 418, 424, 510

 Qafe (Qafa, Chiaf) e Barmashit, 277, 280, 291, 805.
 Qafe e Bubesit, 454, 462, 466, 468, 469, 528, 600.
 Qafe e Kiçcokut (Chiciocut), 454, 462, 466, 468, 469, 474, 482, 491-493, 525, 528, 540, 548,
 636, 637, 747.
 Qafe e Dardhes, 332, 349, 553.
 Qafe e Dellenjes, 274, 280, 282,290, 292.
 Qafe e Devris, 346, 349, 350, 358, 363, 364,365,374,409,458.
 Qafe e Drass, 392, 394, 433, 434, 495, 742
 Qafe e Sofiut, 461, 463, 468, 469, 594, 598, 599, 621, 632, 645.

The Greek Campaign

Qafe e Trepelit, 454, 528.
 Qafe e Gllaves, 337, 540.
Qafe e Gostancka, 240, 364.
 Qafe e Gurt, 494, 495, 500, 501.
 Qafe e Kualibardhe, 269, 299, 300, 303, 304, 357, 358, 364.
 Qafe e Kulmakes, 349, 352, 353, 363, 410, 432, 469, 656, 663, 745.
 Qafe e Llogorait (Logora), 296, 359, 387, 400, 426, 497, 670.
 Qafe e Lusit, 463, 468, 491, 524, 586, 587, 588, 589, 613, 624, 640, 644.
 Qafe e Marte, 240, 257, 258, 264, 265, 274, 280, 282, 290, 291, 296, 304, 324, 364.
 Qafe e Mezgoranit, 468, 540, 542, 544, 545, 548, 552, 558, 560, 590, 595, 600, 611, 615, 619, 637.
 Qafe e Murit, 469, 493, 528, 594, 595, 598
 Qafe e Murrizes, 698, 702.
 Qafe e Murzines, 303, 304, 307.
 Qafe e Pilshes, 395.
 Qafe e Qarrit, 225, 236, 240, 243, 245,
 246, 251, 255, 261, 272, 277, 337, 440, 660, 719, 730, 732, 744, 805.
 Qafe e Qeparaojt, 392, 394.
 Qafe e Sirakut 401 410 441.
 Qafe e Tanes, 696, 707, 722, 724.
 Qafe e Vashes, 725
 Qafe e Vestes, 392, 394, 495, 753.

Radati 302 354 375 749 753.
 Ragusa (anche Dubrovnik), 693, 695, 696, 767.
 Raponi f., 669, 698.
 Raveni, 162, 163
 Rehova, 447, 450, 589, 602.
 Rezan, 708, 727.
 Rodi, 81, 576.
 Rogozhine, 350, 396, 419, 421, 423, 429, 437, 488, 676.

Sajada, .162, 282.
 Salarije, 381, 386, 387, 390, 402, 406, 434, 479, 530, 540, 560, 568.
 Saliari, 627.
 Salisburgo, 21, 512.
 Salonicco, 21, 26, 61, 68, 70, 76, 82, 83, 89, 90, 92, 97, 98, 102, 103, 113, 118, 129, 132, 138,
 139, 143, 144, 155, 195, 198, 233, 314, 317, 318, 440, 500, 504-506, 508-510, 576-580,
 582, 606, 643, 669, 670, 673, 679, 701, 710, 711, 715, 741, 766.
 Samarina, 171, 178, 275.
 San Giovanni di Medua, 88, 333.
 Santa Maura 46, 78, 117.
 Santi .Quaranta (anche Porto Edda), 49, 86, 88, 92, 94, 102, 103, 212, 260, 261, 274, 280-282,
 300, 301, 309, 321, 336, .392, 427.
 Sarandaporos f., 171-173, 175, 179, 182, .200, 230, 270, 277, 734, 762
 Scutari, 24, 98, 437, 667, 669, 670, 678, 682, 684-690, 693, 701, 702, 711.
 Semeni f., 569, 740.
 Servi a, 157, 717.
 Shemerdhej, 652.
 Shengjergji, 108, 696, 698.
 Siniatsiko m., 718, 719.

The Greek Campaign

Skumbini (Skumbi) f., 86, 92, 262, 264, 267, 323, 330, 338, 340, 349, 416, 422, 437, 438, 461, 569, 643, 669, 682, 698, 722, 724, 726.

Sinanaj, 544, 560, 565, 742.

Skoplje, 82, 669, 679, 680, 685, 692, 700, 701 717 741.

Smerderke, 98, 130, 242.

Smokthina t., 387, 395, 421, 493, 494, 559

Smohka m., 150, 172, 175, 176, 178, 180, 182, 233, 519.

Spalato, 680, 684.

Souflikas. m., 176, 186.

Starova, 660.

Stavros m., 173, 175, 178, 182, 277.

Strakavec m., 297, 303, 354, 372, 374, 387, 389.

Stratsani, 172, 200, 201.

Strebilova, 343, 349, 676, 696, 705.

Struga, 683, 696, 698, 700, 707; 711, 722, 725, 727.

Struma f., 642, 643, 679, 715.

Stugara m, 744.

Suhagora m., 94, 274, 280, 290, 292, 294, 299, 302, 303, 306, 375.

Suhs t., 94, 274, 280, 290, 292, 294, 299, 302, 303, 306, 375.

Suka (Suk), 442, 444, 450, 452, 494, 636, 746.

Sushiça f., 337) 350, 353, 358, 359, 387, 390, 392, 396-401, 412, 417, 418, 423, 433, 434, 438, 481, 482, 483, 487, 493 - 495, 497-500, 523, 524, 540, 559, 625 - 627 632 740, 742, 753.

Tarabosh m., 687, 693.

Tepeleni, 44, 86, 92, 94, 261, 281, 282, 296, 297, 299, 300, 306, 325, 332, 333, 337, 349, 355, 357, 359, 365, 372, 375, 378, 380, 381, 383, 387, 389, 401, 406, 407, 418, 422, 424, 425, 427, 428, 434, 442, 444, 446, 452, 453, 458, 461, 482, 483, 487, 489, 491, 499, 500, 521, 523, 524, 533, 534, 537, 538, 540, 542, 545, 548, 549, 551, 552, 554-556, 558-560, 565, 568, 570, 577, 585, 589, 590, 593-595, 600, 607, 608, 616, 618, 619, 621, 625-629, 632, 636, 640-642, 645, 647,

660, 670, 676-679, 681, 682, 686, 702, 721, 741, 742, 746, 747, 759, 767, 777, 805.

Te Puzi, 267, 338.

Terbaçci, 400, 497.

Tem, 73, 74.

Teqe, 595, 651, 652, 654, 739, 740, 745.

Tetovo, 692, 700.

Thesprotia, 153, 159, 162, 169, 170.

Thmonit m., 400, 402, 495.

Tirana, 11, 28, 38, 49, 50, 79-81, 85, 86, 92, 126, 129, 130, 189, 194, 198, 199, 202, 203, 214, 217, 225, 226, 236, 239, 241, 246, 252, 274, 296, 301, 307, 308, 311, 325, 329-331, 333, 340, 418, 419, 430, 437, 439, 474, 476, 499, 507, 523, 585, 601, 602, 648, 654, 660, 670, 676, 681, 683, 685, 687, 689, 692, 696, 698, 701, 711, 724, 761, 764, 794, 795, 807.

Tobruk, 514-516.

Tolari, 373, 411, 444.

Tomori (vds. Mali Tomor).

Tomorreces f., 264, 265, 282, 283, 290, 304, 345, 346, 349, 350, 353, 357, 359, 361, 363, 364, 401, 415, 417, 425, 430, 433, 438, 442, 445, 456, 458, 461, 482, 489, 490, 553, 649, 651-658, 660, 663, 698, 724, 725, 730, 740.

Trikkala, 89, 121, 141, 175.

The Greek Campaign

Trsternku, 186.

Turan, 563.

Uskub, 681, 684, 689, 692.

Valamare m., 151, 259, 340.

Valona, 24, 27, 76, 77, 86, 88, 90, 92, 94, 102, 129, 130, 146, 191, 194, 195, 197, 200, 217, 222, 226, 228, 260, 261, 272, 274, 281, 294, 296, 299, 314, 324, 331-333, 335, 337, 349, 350, 352, 354, 359, 363, 375, 387, 390, 395, 396, 398, 400-402, 415-419, 422, 425-430, 433, 437-439, 449, 458, 461, 466, 479, 482, 487, 490, 494, 495, 500, 512, 513, 515, 523, 538, 547-549, 551, 559, 565, 568, 569, 577, 595, 603, 625, 627, 628, 649, 718, 740, 774, 775, 794, 795.

Vardar f., 98, 645, 700, 715, 767.

Varfani, 169, 200, 201.

Varibodi, 373, 409, 410, 411.

Varri lamit, 343, 346, 805.

Vasilitsa m., 717, 719. .

Venetikos f., 139, 717.

Verçces, 461, 652:

Vermic, 387, 494, 497.

Vermilon m., 136, 139, 580, 712, 717.

Vemon m., 719, 730.

Verniku, 186, 187.

Verria, 98 121 712

Veve, 707, 718.

Vienna, 59, 673, 675.

Vojussa (anche Aoo) f., 44, 92, 109, 141, 148, 157, 160, 182, 219, 221, 257, 260, 261, 279, 283, 290, 291, 297, 299, 349, 357, 359, 361, 366, 370, 372-375, 387, 402, 407, 415, 422, 425, 426, 433, 442, 444, 445, 452, 483, 485, 489, 491, 531, 537, 538, 545, 547 551, 552, 554-556, 559, 560, 562-564, 566-568, 588, 590, 594, 607, 608, 616, 618, 625, 641, 645, 740-742, 748, 753, 762.

Vovusa, 173, 176, 179, 181.

Vranishta, 242, 249, 255, 398, 497.

Vrisochori, 175, 181

Zagorias f., 94, 297, 299, 303, 304, 357, 358, 361, 363, 372, 378, 387, 389, 407, 412, 442, 456, 479, 483, 491, 531, 533, 538, 545, 547, 548, 550, 552, 553, 556, 560, 565, 616.

Zante, 46, 78, 83, 117, 195.

Zemblaku, 183, 242.

Zgozhde 343 676

Zhepova, 452, 763.

Zvezde, 255.

ITALIAN ARMED FORCES

Comando Superiore Truppe Albania (CSTA), 23, 24, 28, 42, 45, 48, 49, 63, 76, 77, 106, 108, 111, 113-116, 120, 122, 128-130, 161, 170, 179, 210, 215-218.

Comando Superiore Forze Armate Albama (CSFAA), 219, 221, 239; 240, 264, 267, 280, 283, 306, 307, 311, 329, 335, 338, 339, 345, 349, 354, 395, 415, 422, 427, 437, 439, 447, 453, 458, 469, 479, 482, 498, 502, 508, 509, 536, 545, 595, 601, 626, 632, 647, 662, 670, 680, 681, 683, 687-689, 692, 693, 695, 697, 707, 708, 721, 730, 732, 734, 741, 743, 747, 751,

The Greek Campaign

752, 762, 763, 766, 767, 769, 776, 790, 796, 804.
 Intendenza Superiore Albania, 204, 227, 526, 799.
 Direzione Superiore Servizi Albania, 78, 211, 212.
 Comando Aeronautica Albania, 214, 216, 227, 430, 435.

Armies:

1st Army, 450
 2nd Army, 56, 204, 219, 684.
 3rd Army, 37.
 6th Army, 56, 204.
 7th Army, 56.
 8th Army, 56.
 9th Army, 204, 206, 208, 223, 225, 226, 240, 243, 245, 250, 251, 253, 254, 257, 264, 272, 277, 281, 282, 290, 291, 296, 297, 303, 306, 310, 311, 321, 322, 330, 332, 335, 338, 343, 345, 346, 349, 352, 359, 361, 363-365, 415, 417, 419, 425-428, 437, 439, 440, 462, 488, 553, 569, 593, 601, 606, 628, 630, 631, 634-636, 642, 643, 647, 653, 658, 660, 662, 676, 677, 683, 696, 700, 707, 718, 721, 724, 726, 729, 734, 735, 737, 739, 742, 743, 750, 762, 766, 767, 801, 804, 806.
 11th armata, 204, 206, 208, 217, 219, 223, 225, 226, 245, 264, 269, 270, 272, 274, 275, 277, 281, 294, 296, 297, 299-301, 304, 306, 307, 310, 311, 321, 322, 331, 332, 333, 336, 343, 346, 349, 354, 355, 358, 359, 361, 363-365, 393, 395, 401, 404, 411, 412, 415, 417, 419, 425, 427, 434, 437, 439, 440, 450, 453, 462, 481, 482, 488, 490, 492, 499, 500, 523, 527, 528, 530, 533, 534, 551, 554, 559, 564, 569, 570, 586, 594, 595, 601, 605, 606, 609, 625, 628, 629, 632, 634, 637, 642, 644, 647, 651, 652, 656, 660, 670, 676, 677, 681, 700, 721, 722, 730, 734, 739, 742, 743, 746, 761, 762, 766-768, 801, 803, 806, 811.

Army Corps:

Army Corps *Ciamuna*, 122, 157, 159, 169, 199, 200, 203, 209, 210, 212, 219, 269, 275, 283, 308.
 Army Corps speciale, 395, 397, 400, 401, 402, 430, 490, 493, 494, 495, 499, 500, 501 629, 741-743, 801, 804
 III Army Corps, 191, 219, 225, 226, 236, 245, 249, 251, 257, 262, 265, 267, 297, 338, 341, 507, 648, 649, 658-660, 665, 696, 708, 722, 724-726, 729, 730, 734, 750, 762, 766, 801, 804.
 IV Army Corps, 217, 235, 425, 433, 445, 447, 450, 453, 455, 460, 461, 466, 468-470, 481, 482, 493, 523, 525, 526, 528, 529, 534, 540, 544, 558, 565, 566, 586, 587, 594, 597, 599, 608, 609, 611, 615, 618, 622-624, 627-630, 632, 634, 636, 640-644, 677, 729, 730, 739, 741-746, 752, 753, 766, 801, 803.
 VIII Army Corps, 191, 217, 226, 257, 272, 279, 283, 287, 292, 297, 303, 304, 358, 361, 363, 372, 373, 380, 401, 408, 425, 430, 444, 445, 447, 450, 452, 453, 461, 466, 468-470, 472, 481, 491, 492, 523-526, 530-534, 540, 542, 544, 545, 548, 550, 551, 555, 558, 565, 566, 586-590, 593-595, 599, 600, 606, 608, 609, 611, 615, 616, 618, 622, 624, 626-630, 632, 634, 636, 637, 640-644, 729, 739, 741-748, 750, 753, 762, 775, 788, 801, 803.
 IX Army Corps, 37, 45, 108.
 XIV Army Corps, 644, 665, 676, 683, 684, 690, 696, 697, 702, 721, 729, 801, 804.
 XVI Army Corps, 54.
 XVII Army Corps, 54, 683-685, 688, 690, 693, 695, 721, 729, 801, 804.
 XXV Army Corps, 217, 219, 226, 283, 290, 292, 294, 297, 302, 303, 304, 306, 307, 358, 361, 372, 373, 378, 385, 386, 389, 393, 396, 397, 401, 402, 407, 427, 430, 434, 446, 452, 468, 469, 472, 478, 479, 491-493, 499, 500, 523-526, 528, 530, 531, 537, 540, 545, 550, 551-553, 555, 560, 565-568, 570, 589, 594, 595, 600, 611, 616, 623, 624, 627-630, 679, 729,

The Greek Campaign

- 739, 741-743, 746, 747, 750, 751, 753, 763, 766, 800, 803.
- XXVI Army Corps, 23, 37, 108, 111, 114, 115, 119, 128, 189, 199, 200, 212, 219, 225, 226, 236, 238, 245, 246, 251, 254, 257, 267, 269, 270, 272, 290, 336, 341, 345, 346, 349, 354, 553, 558, 608, 609, 618, 628, 630, 634, 636, 640, 641, 648, 651, 653, 656, 658-660, 662, 697, 708, 724, 725, 729, 730, 737, 746, 750, 762, 766, 800, 804.
- Divisions:
- 2nd ID *Sforzesca*, 466, 485, 487-489, 492, 524, 525, 527, 531, 534, 548, 550, 553, 555, 559, 560, 589, 594, 600, 609, 611, 619, 742, 746, 801, 804,
- 6th ID *Cuneo*, 325, 400, 416, 419, 425, 428, 493, 445-447, 449-456, 460, 461, 463, 466, 469, 470, 489, 490, 512, 521, 559, 568, 616, 618, 625, 626, 632, 641, 649, 677, 749, 801, 803, 804.
- 7th ID *Lupi di Toscana*, 24, 353, 416, 430, 445-447, 449-456, 460, 461, 463, 466, 469, 470, 489, 490, 512, 521, 559, 568, 616, 618, 625, 626, 632, 641, 649, 677, 749, 801, 803, 804.
- 11th ID *Brennero*, 335, 406, 407, 416, 419, 425-428, 430, 433, 434, 445, 446, 479, 481, 495, 530, 531, 534, 560, 567, 625, 742, 747, 787, 801, 803
- 18th ID *Messina*, 633, 644, 662, 663, 665, 684, 687-690, 693, 695, 801, 803, 804.
- 19th ID *Venezia*, 23, 109, 114, 118, 119, 128, 152, 186, 188, 191, 196, 197, 199, 206, 223, 236, 241, 245, 247, 249, 250, 251, 262, 264, 267, 338, 341, 345, 439, 658, 663, 722, 725, 726, 730, 732, 734, 794, 800, 804.
- 22nd ID *Cacciatori delle Alpi*, 463, 466, 469, 470, 472, 483, 488, 489, 499, 525, 527, 528, 530, 592, 597-599, 611, 613, 615, 641, 643, 645, 740, 745, 746, 748, 801, 803
- 23rd ID *Ferrara*, 23, 24, 26, 44, 109, 111, 112, 115, 118, 122, 275, 289, 292, 294, 297, 302, 303, 354, 355, 375, 376, 378, 380, 382, 385, 386, 387, 397, 404, 406, 407, 427, 439, 479, 530, 531, 548, 550, 553, 558, 560, 562, 566, 616, 742, 746, 747, 794, 800, 804.
- 24th ID *Pinerolo*, 196, 454, 455, 461, 463, 466, 469, 470, 472, 483, 490, 524, 525, 528, 587, 592, 600, 602, 604, 609, 613, 620, 622, 623, 625, 628, 636, 640, 641, 643, 644, 657, 658, 685, 700, 707, 726, 734, 801, 803.
- 29th ID *Piemonte*, 39, 43, 109, 116, 119, 122, 183, 186, 197, 199, 200, 206, 227, 236, 250, 251, 258, 265, 290, 324, 343, 345, 349, 350, 490, 526, 565, 602, 625, 628, 632, 658, 660, 662, 725, 795, 800, 804.
- 32nd ID *Marche*, 677, 683, 684, 693, 695, 702, 801, 803, 804.
- 33rd ID *Acqui*, 335, 349, 493, 495, 497, 500, 501, 535, 804.
- 36th ID *Forlì*, 331, 345, 466, 488, 489, 658, 660, 663, 665, 722, 801, 803, 804.
- 37th ID *Modena*, 76, 118, 226, 228, 245, 274, 279, 283, 294, 296, 297, 302, 304, 307, 308, 331, 370, 378, 380-382, 384-386, 389, 390, 402, 404, 406, 407, 417, 427, 439, 446, 479, 481, 490, 530, 531, 547, 551, 555, 559, 560, 565, 567, 641, 742, 747, 791, 804.
- 38th ID *Puglie*, 544, 547, 548, 551, 555, 592, 595, 600, 603, 604, 609, 613, 615, 617, 620, 625, 628, 631, 641-643, 676, 677, 681, 682, 688, 690, 704, 801, 803, 804.
- 41st ID. *Firenze*. 628, 631, 643, 644, 665, 676, 681, 683, 690, 803, 804.
- 47th ID. *Bari*, 45, 52, 108, 113, 182, 192, 197, 199, 200, 203, 206, 208, 217, 219, 221, 222, 226, 227, 257, 265, 269, 270, 272, 280, 287, 290, 291, 354, 355, 361, 368, 370, 372-374, 380, 406, 409, 410, 439, 444, 447, 449, 451, 452, 455, 456, 460, 461, 463, 466, 468, 472, 490, 592, 595, 606, 608, 609, 617, 619, 620, 622-624, 628, 641, 644, 677, 685, 746-749, 795, 801, 803.
- 48th ID. *Taro*, 196, 198, 247, 257, 258, 310, 345, 433, 658, 663, 665, 722, 725, 728, 791, 801, 804.
- 49th ID *Panna*, 39, 43, 48, 109, 115, 118, 119, 128, 183, 186, 197, 199, 206, 223, 227, 236, 250, 256, 258, 265, 345, 346, 348, 349, 352, 353, 439, 490, 526, 647, 648, 651, 653, 654, 656-658, 662, 730, 794, 800, 804.
- 51st ID. *Siena*, 39, 43, 49, 109, 111, 115, 118, 122, 126, 162, 163, 169, 170, 201, 206, 209, 219, 221, 222, 227, 229, 270, 292, 297, 302-304, 358, 376, 382, 390, 393, 395, 396, 398, 400, 417, 418, 423, 426, 433, 445, 447, 452, 456, 461, 463, 466, 470, 490, 493, 524, 525, 528, 587, 595, 600, 609,

The Greek Campaign

- 617-619, 622, 624, 626, 640, 641, 644, 746, 794, 800, 803.
- 53rd ID *Arezzo*, 23, 24, 52, 109, 114, 118, 119, 152, 189, 196, 197, 199, 206, 221, 227, 236, 238, 245, 249, 251, 267, 338, 341, 345, 439, 648, 658, 663, 681, 690, 696, 697, 700, 707, 708, 721, 722, 727, 794, 800, 804.
- 56th ID *Casale*, 466, 628, 631, 634, 645, 702, 742, 743, 746, 747, 749, 763, 801, 803.
- 58th ID *Legnano*, 416, 430, 434, 462, 482, 483, 485, 488, 489, 492, 495, 497-500, 521, 530, 544, 550, 553, 555, 558, 560, 565, 589, 595, 608, 616, 637, 740-742, 746, 801, 803, 804.
- 59th ID. *Cagliari*, 466, 488, 489, 492, 521, 524, 525, 527, 528, 587, 592, 599, 600, 603-605, 617, 620, 622, 623, 626, 628, 640, 641, 644, 645, 747-749, 801, 803.
- 101st mot. D. *Trieste*, 76, 114, 198, 228, 240, 310, 428, 433, 453, 683, 801.
- 131st Arm. D. *Centauro*, 23, 44, 52, 109, 111, 112, 115, 118, 122, 126, 160, 161, 165, 168, 169, 200, 201, 206, 209, 219, 227, 292, 294, 297, 302, 307, 358, 378, 404, 439, 481, 511, 524, 595, 603, 617, 636, 662, 676, 681, 682, 686, 687, 689, 690, 693, 695, 795, 801, 804.
- 1st alp. D. *Cuneense*, 335, 349, 350, 352, 416, 427, 428, 493, 630-632, 634, 636, 640, 643-645, 651-654, 656, 657, 662, 665, 681, 683, 690, 696, 700, 702, 704, 706-708, 725, 726, 730, 801, 803, 804.
- 2nd alp. D. *Taurinense*, 431, 631.
- 3rd alp. D. *Trentina*, 198, 202, 222, 226, 238, 245, 251, 254, 264, 308, 338, 348, 352, 439, 630, 651, 656, 658, 662, 722, 727, 734, 795, 801, 804.
- 5th alp. D. *Pusteria*, 228, 240, 283, 296, 297, 299, 300, 304, 306, 310, 327, 353-355, 357, 364, 366, 368, 374, 425, 426, 434, 439, 444, 445, 449, 451, 461, 462, 469, 470, 482, 490, 528, 597-599, 611, 624, 630, 632, 641, 643, 651, 653, 730, 734, 739, 745, 746, 795, 801, 803.
- alp. D. *speclale*, 396, 398, 493, 495, 497, 500, 501, 535, 804.

Raggruppamento di forze:

Raggruppamento *Azzaro*, 270, 272.

Raggruppamento *Carloni*, 466.

Raggruppamento *De Renzi*, 466, 470

Raggruppamento *Melotti*, 497

Raggruppamento *Pizzi*, 304, 361, 372, 373, 452, 479, 481, 483, 487, 531, 555, 558, 560, 564, 565, 600, 632, 641, 742.

Raggruppamento *Scrugli*, 290, 341.

Raggruppamento *Signorini*, 559, 600, 609, 611, 619, 631, 749.

Raggruppamento *Solinas*, 270, 307.

Raggruppamento del Litorale, 109, 115, 116, 118, 119, 122, 126, 170, 201, 206, 212, 219, 221, 234, 307.

Raggruppamento CC.NN. *Biscaccianti*, 707, 708.

Raggruppamento CC.NN. *Diamanti*, 685, 688, 690.

Raggruppamento CC.NN. *Galbiati*, 400, 483, 494, 495, 534, 560, 600, 609, 641, 804.

Raggruppamento milizia forestale *Agostini*, 663, 676, 681, 683, 688.

Reggimenti:

3rd Grenadiers of Sardegna, 44, 109, 122, 290, 291, 297, 302, 378, 384, 386, 387, 406, 479, 531, 746, 805.

3rd rgt. Inf. *Piemonte*, 269, 795.

4th rgt. Inf. *Piemonte*, 795.

7th rgt. Inf. *Cuneo*, 494, 495.

8th rgt. Inf. *Cuneo*, 425, 466, 501.

11th rgt. Inf. *Casale*, 749.

13th rgt. Inf. *Pinerolo*, 466, 468, 525, 707, 805.

14th rgt. Inf. *Pinerolo*, 466, 525.

17th rgt. Inf. *Acqui*, 386, 395, 396, 494, 787.

18th rgt. Inf. *Acqui*, 386, 390, 402, 404, 406, 407, 418, 479, 501, 531, 560, 625, 787.

31st rgt. Inf. *Siena*, 162, 163, 392, 394, 396, 398, 433, 452, 461, 466.

32nd rgt. Inf. *Siena*, 162, 394, 401, 805.

41st rgt. Inf. *Modelza*, 290, 297, 304, 355, 370, 373, 380, 381, 411, 470, 551, 552, 559,

The Greek Campaign

602,619,641.
 42nd rgt. Inf. *Modena*, 226, 294,307, 355, 378, 380, 383, 384, 385, 479, 531, 560, 565, 805.
 47th rgt. Inf. *Ferrara*, 157, 159, 165, 272, 283, 307, 378, 383, 386, 389, 479, 531, 560, 794, 805.
 48th rgt. Inf. *Ferrara*, 157, 165, 286, 307, 378, 387, 479, 526, 531, 547, 549, 550, 558, 560, 563, 565, 794, 805.
 49th rgt. Inf. *Parma*, 794.
 50th rgt. Inf. *Parma*, 794.
 51st rgt. Inf. *Cacciatori delle Alpi*, 463, 469
 52nd rgt. Inf. *Cacciatori delle Alpi*, 463, 469, 544, 599.
 53rd rgt. Inf. *Sforzesca*, 487, 545, 550, 559, 619.
 54th rgt. Inf. *Sforzesca*, 545, 559, 619.
 63rd rgt. Inf. *Cagliari*, 613, 616, 748, 749.
 64th rgt. Inf. *Cagliari*, 613.
 65th rgt. Inf. *Trieste*, 493.
 66th rgt. Inf. *Trieste*, 493.
 67th rgt. Inf. *Legnano*, 485, 489, 531, 545, 558, 563, 565.
 68th rgt. Inf. *Legnano*, 485, 487, 489, 531, 567.
 72nd rgt. Inf. *Puglie*, 603, 690.
 77th rgt. Inf. *Lupi di Toscana*, 450, 460, 559.
 78th rgt. Inf. *Lupi di Toscana*, 450, 460, 463, 559
 83th rgt. Inf. *Venezia*, 186, 189.
 84th rgt. Inf. *Venezia*, 249, 794, 805.
 94th rgt. Inf. *Messina*, 693.
 127th rgt. Inf. *Firenze*, 706, 805.
 128th rgt. Inf. *Firenze*, 705.
 139th rgt. Inf. *Bari*, 270, 280, 290, 365, 366, 372, 373, 463, 466, 530, 748, 795.
 140th rgt. Inf. *Bari*, 270, 280, 290, 372, 373, 411, 452, 453, 466, 623, 748, 749, 795, 805.
 207th rgt. Inf. *Taro*, 323, 725.
 208th rgt. Inf. *TaTo*, 258.
 225th rgt. Inf. *Arezzo*, 249, 663, 700, 722.
 226th rgt. Inf. *Arezzo*, 663, 696.
 231st rgt. Inf. *Brennero*, 406, 479, 531, 534, 560.
 232nd rgt. Inf. *Brennero*, 406, 479, 531, 534, 560.
 1st rgt.alp. *Cuneense*, 352, 353, 702, 704.
 2nd rgt.alp. *Cuneense*, 352, 353, 401, 418, 428, 493, 495, 631, 702.
 5th rgt.alp. *Tridentina*, 226, 346, 348, 350, 654, 657, 731, 795, 805.
 6th rgt.alp. *Tridentina*, 226, 346, 352, 353, 657, 795.
 7th rgt.alp. *Pusteria*, 297, 363, 365, 463, 739, 805.
 8th rgt.alp. *julia*, -172, 175, 176, 178, 179, 181, 182, 270, 280, 290, 291, 355, 366, 370, 410, 552, 553, 556, 560, 562, 564, 567, 749, 795, 806.
 9th rgt.alp. *Julia*, 173, 176, 178, 179, 183, 200, 270, 280, 290, 355, 366, 367, 368, 370, 373, 410, 411, 559, 560, 795, 805, 806.
 11th rgt.alp. *Pusteria*, 463, 469, 470, 529, 615, 624, 636, 641, 745.
 1st bers. rgt., 197, 200, 246, 251, 270, 603, 795.
 2nd bers. rgt., 197, 198, 378, 452, 479, 481, 483, 531, 556, 560, 564, 567, 600, 641, 795.
 4th bers. rgt., 197, 198, 241, 246, 251, 663, 696, 700, 707, 730, 732, 734, 749, 795, 804.
 5th bers. rgt., 159, 384, 396, 406, 479,531, 560, 603.
 9th bers. rgt., 493.
 6th rgt. *Lancieri di Aosta*, 26, 48, 109, 122, 382, 682, 705.
 7th rgt. *Lancien' di Milano*, 26, 48, 109, 122, 204, 663, 676, 683, 700, 705, 706, 734, 735, 762,

The Greek Campaign

764.

19th rgt. *Cavalleggeri Guide*, 48, 162, 165, 695.

10th rgt.a.camp. *Siena*, 794.

14th rgt.a.camp. *Ferrara*, 159, 286, 806.

17th rgt.a.camp. *Sforzesca*, 540, 542, 619.

19th rgt.a.camp. *Venezia*, 794.

21st rgt.a.mot. *Trieste*, 433.

24th rgt.a.camp. *Piemonte*, 795.

29th rgt.a.camp. *Modena*, 226.

49th rgt.a.camp. *Parma*, 794.

53rd rgt.a.camp. *Arezzo*, 794.

131st rgt.a.camp. *Centauro*, 365.

2nd rgt.a.alp: *Tridentina*, 795.

3rd rgt.a.alp. *Julia*, 450, 795, 806.

4th rgt.a.alp. *Cuneense*, 352.

5th rgt.a.alp. *Pusteria*, 355, 365.

31st rgt.f.carrista, 168, 494, 795.

Raggruppamenti d'arma:

1st gruppo alpini valle, 198, 226, 279.

13th raggruppamento G.a.F., 750.

26th raggruppamento artiglieria C.A., 754.

9th aggruppamento genio, 236

26th raggruppamento genio, 754.

Reparti della M.V.S.N.:

18th legion CC.NN., 396, 494

26th legion CC.NN., 485, 531, 560, 562, 563, 567.

30th legion CC.NN., 559, 619.

36th legion CC.NN., 560.

45th legion CC.NN., 560.

82nd legion CC.NN., 560.

105th legion CC.NN., 624.

GERMAN ARMY

2nd Army, 721, 727.

12th Army, 692, 700, 708, 717, 761, 768, 769

XVII Army Corps, 715.

XVIII Army Corps, 679.

XL Army Corps, 700, 718.

2nd Arm Div., 715.

5th Mtn Div., 715

6th Mtn Div., 715

9th Arm Div., 700.

72nd Inf. Div., 715.

73rd Inf Div., 734, 764.

Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, 760, 762.

GREEK ARMY

Armies:

Sezione d'armata Epiro, 538, 565, 712, 719, 720, 724, 740, 755, 757, 758, 760, 761, 765, 769.

Sezione d'armata Kavala (TSK), 139, 144.

Sezione d'armata Macedonia Orientale.

The Greek Campaign

(TSAM), 144, 155, 538, 712, 760.

Sezione d'armata Macedonia Occidentale (SAMO), 120, 148, 150, 153, 172, 176, 186, 187, 230, 233-235, 238, 241, 243, 260, 261, 275, 337, 345, 352, 374, 442, 538, 566, 663, 712, 719, 720, 724, 725, 741, 743, 748, 755, 756, 760, 765.

Sezione d'armata Macedonia Centrale, 712.

Sezione d'armata Tracia, 538.

Army Corps:

I Army Corps, 132, 139, 144, 150, 152, 155, 234, 235, 261, 275, 287, 336, 337, 363, 364, 372, 375, 377, 383, 387, 390, 397, 398, 407, 442, 458, 479, 491, 538, 540, 560, 565, 567, 712, 748, 754, 756.

II Army Corps, 132, 139, 141, 143, 152, 155, 156, 176, 178, 179, 182, 186, 231, 233, 234, 235, 243, 261, 265, 275, 277, 280, 287, 291, 292, 337, 345, 352,

363, 374, 375, 387, 398, 408, 442, 447, 458, 537, 538, 540, 560, 565, 609, 629, 712, 718, 740, 744, 746, 748, 755, 756, 757.

III Army Corps, 132, 139, 143, 178, 186, 230, 231, 233-235, 238, 242, 244, 255, 261, 262, 264, 265, 311, 337, 345, 398, 538, 665, 712, 748, 760

IV Army Corps, 132, 139, 233, 243, 538, 712.

V Army Corps, 132, 139, 352, 442, 456, 538, 663.

K divisions Group, 254, 255, 264, 265, 291, 337, 345, 346, 352.

Divisions:

1st Inf.Div., 132, 143, 147, 155, 172, 176, 182, 187, 235, 275, 277, 287, 311, 337, 363, 366, 397, 406, 408, 409, 410, 411, 444, 468, 481, 527, 538, 609, 730, 741, 744, 748.

2nd Inf.Div., 132, 155, 235, 283, 292, 299, 303, 311, 337, 372, 375, 376, 378, 387, 390, 397, 402, 406, 407, 479, 538, 545, 547, 560, 565, 566, 567, 748.

3rd Inf.Div., 104, 106, 132, 155, 175, 235, 302, 303, 311, 337, 375-378, 387, 392, 397, 401, 497, 538, 540, 547, 565, 740, 748.

4th Inf.Div., 132, 155, 235, 261, 311, 337, 376-378, 383, 384, 387, 402, 442, 479, 538, 560, 740, 748, 755, 756.

5th Inf.Div., 132, 139, 144, 155, 243, 261, 311, 442, 538, 540, 545, 548, 550, 554, 560, 565, 609, 642, 741, 748.

6th Inf.Div., 132, 442, 516, 538, 560, 577, 609, 741, 748.

7th Inf.Div., 132, 516.

8th Inf.Div., 10, 11, 98, 104, 132, 137, 139, 141, 143, 147, 148, 150, 151, 153, 161, 165, 175, 178, 181, 235, 292, 294, 299, 302, 303, 311, 336, 337, 375-377, 479, 482, 497, 538, 540, 547, 748, 758.

9th Inf.Div., 10, 11, 132, 137, 141, 143, 147, 151, 153, 186, 187, 235, 236, 238, 239, 241, 243, 245, 254, 255, 262, 264, 265, 311, 337, 341, 350, 648, 663, 722, 734, 748.

10th Inf.Div., 132, 143, 155, 231, 235, 236, 239, 241, 243, 255, 265, 311, 337, 345, 346, 656, 663, 748.

11th Inf.Div., 132, 143, 155, 187, 233, 241, 243, 255, 265, 291, 311, 337, 364, 408, 409, 411, 527, 530, 538, 599, 741, 744, 748, 758.

12th Inf.Div., 132, 516, 538, 712, 717, 719.

13th Inf.Div., 132, 233, 239, 242, 243, 254, 255, 261, 265, 275, 277, 337, 341, 345, 350, 638, 663, 719, 748.

14th Inf.Div., 132, 516.

15th Inf.Div., 150, 188, 235, 236, 238, 239, 241, 243, 254, 255, 262, 311, 337, 364, 408, 409, 411, 444, 450, 460, 469, 491, 530, 538, 599, 609, 741, 748.

16th Inf.Div., 235, 261, 311, 337.

17th Inf.Div., 187, 233, 235, 248, 265, 267, 311, 337, 341, 345, 350, 538, 360, 565,

The Greek Campaign

566,567,648, 741,748,758.
 19th mot. Div., 712, 715.
 20th Inf.Div., 712, 715, 717, 718, 719, 734.
 Cavalry Division, 132, 144, 178, 179, 181, 235, 270, 287, 291, 311, 337, 364, 442, 748.

Brigades:

3rd Inf.Bd., 144, 147, 153.
 4th Inf.Bd., 11, 143, 151, 153, 186, 187, 188.
 5th Inf.Bd., 143, 147, 155, 172, 182, 186, 187, 235, 277, 287, 311, 337, 364, 408.
 16th Inf.Bd., 243, 261, 311, 337.
 Cav., Bd. 179, 275, 337, 364.

Regiments:

1st Inf. Rgt., 734.
 2nd Inf. Rgt., 187.
 4th Inf. Rgt., 178, 181, 527, 588.
 5th Inf. Rgt., 179, 408, 527, 588.
 6th Inf. Rgt., 302, 497.
 7th Inf. Rgt., 178, 179, 444, 489.
 8th Inf. Rgt., 383.
 9th Inf. Rgt., 383, 408.
 11th Inf. Rgt., 377, 383, 562, 567.
 12th Inf. Rgt 302, 390, 497.
 13th Inf. Rgt., 364, 527, 530, 599.
 14th Inf. Rgt., 567
 15th Inf. Rgt., 159, 376.
 16th Inf. Rgt., 444, 527.
 21st Inf. Rgt., 599.
 23rd Inf. rgt., 242, 262.
 24th Inf. rgt., 150, 497.
 27th Inf. rgt., 265.
 28th Inf. rgt., 411, 447, 507, 530, 588, 599.
 29th Inf. rgt., 267, 563, 567.
 30th Inf. rgt., 255, 346, 458, 656.
 31st Inf. rgt., 267.
 32nd Inf. rgt., 265.
 33rd Inf. rgt., 408, 433, 447, 458, 527, 530, 734.
 34th Inf. rgt., 545, 563, 567.
 36th Inf. rgt., 444, 567.
 39th Inf. rgt., 545, 549.
 40th Inf. rgt., 302, 377, 390, 497.
 42nd Inf. rgt., 294.
 43rd Inf. rgt., 540.
 50th Inf. rgt, 255, 409, 527, 599.
 51st Inf. rgt., 527.
 52nd Inf. rgt., 187, 408, 444.
 57th Inf. rgt., 172, 176.
 65th Inf. rgt., 458, 656.
 66th Inf. rgt., 527.
 68th Inf. rgt., 255, 346, 656.
 72nd Inf. rgt., 734.

The Greek Campaign

90th Inf. rgt., 447, 527, 530.
 39th rgt. euzoni, 150, 540.
 40th rgt.euzoni, 150, 161.
 42nd rgt.euzoni, 161.
 1st rgt. Cavalry, 179, 181, 669.
 3rd rgt. Cavalry, 181, 663.
 Complessi di forze:
 Distaccamento Aoo, 179, 181.
 Distaccamento Liuba, 337, 375, 376, 378, 391.
 Distaccamento Pindo 143, 147, 151, 153, 175, 181.
 VIII settore di frontiera, 132, 146.
 IX settore di frontiera, 132, 146, 186.
 IX bis settore di frontiera, 146, 186.

YUGOSLAVIAN ARMY

2nd Army, 683.
 3rd Army, 683, 690.
 15th Inf. Div. Zetska, 690, 692, 693.
 25th Inf. Div. Va rda rska, 690, 705.
 31st Inf. Div. Kosovska, 690.
 15th Inf. rgt., 704.
 30th Inf. rgt., 692.
 47th Inf. rgt., 704
 56th Inf. rgt., 692.
 61st Inf. rgt., 692.

BRITISH ARMY

2nd Inf. Div. New Zeland, 712, 718.
 6th Inf. Div. British, 576.
 1st Arm. Bd. British, 712, 718.

The Greek Campaign



Foto 1: Il generale Sebastiano Visconti Prasca Comandante Superiore Truppe Albania



Foto 2: Il generale Ubaldo Soddu Comandante Superiore Forze Armate Albania



Foto 3: Il generale Ugo Cavallero Comandante Superiore Forze Armate Albania

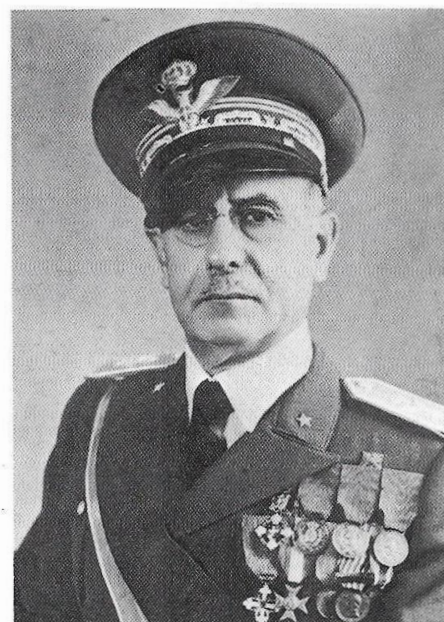


Foto 4: Il generale Carlo Geloso Comandante dell'11^a armata

Picture 1: General Sebastiano Visconti Prasca Commander superior troops Albania.

Picture 2: General Ubaldo Soddu Top Military Commander Albania.

Picture 3: General Ugo Cavallero Top Commander Albanian Army.

Picture 4: General Carlo Geloso Commander of the 11th Army.

The Greek Campaign

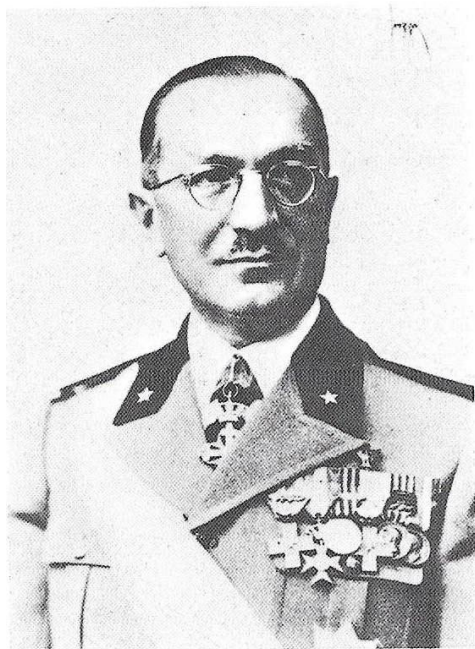


Foto 5: Il generale Mario Vercellino Comandante della 9ª armata



Foto 6: Il generale Alessandro Pirzio Biroli Comandante della 9ª armata



Foto 7: Il generale Antonio Scuero Intendente Superiore Albania



Foto 8: Il generale Gabriele Nasci Comandante del XXVI corpo d'armata

- Picture 5: General Mario Vercellino Commander of the 9th Army.
- Picture 6: General Alessandro Pirzio Biroli Commander of the 9th Army.
- Picture 7: General Antonio Scuero Chief of the Stewardship of Albania.
- Picture 8: General Gabriele Nasci Commander of the XXVI Army Corps.

The Greek Campaign

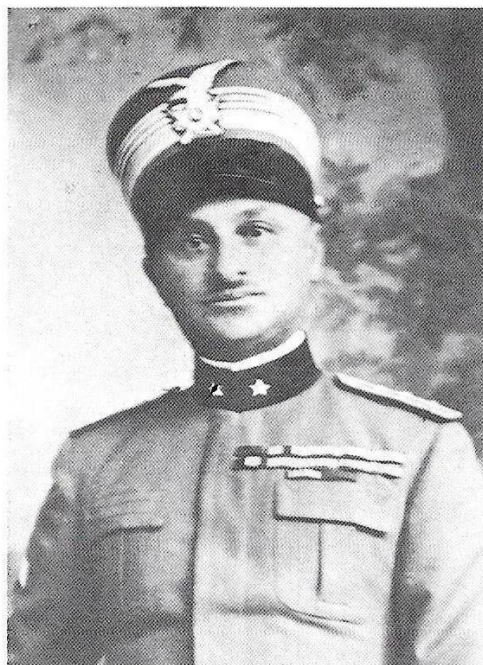


Foto 9: Il generale Carlo Rossi Comandante del XXV corpo d'armata



Foto 10: Il generale Gastone Gambara Comandante dell'VIII corpo d'armata



Foto 11: Il generale Mario Arisio Comandante del IV corpo d'armata



Foto 12: Vittorio Emanuele III visita i campi di battaglia accompagnato dal Gen. Geloso

Picture 9: General Carlo Rossi Commander of the XXV Corps.

Picture 10: General Gastone Gambara Commander VIII Army Corps.

Picture 11: General Mario Arisio Commander of the IV Corps.

Picture 12: Vittorio Emanuele III overlooking the battlefields accompanied by Gen. Geloso.

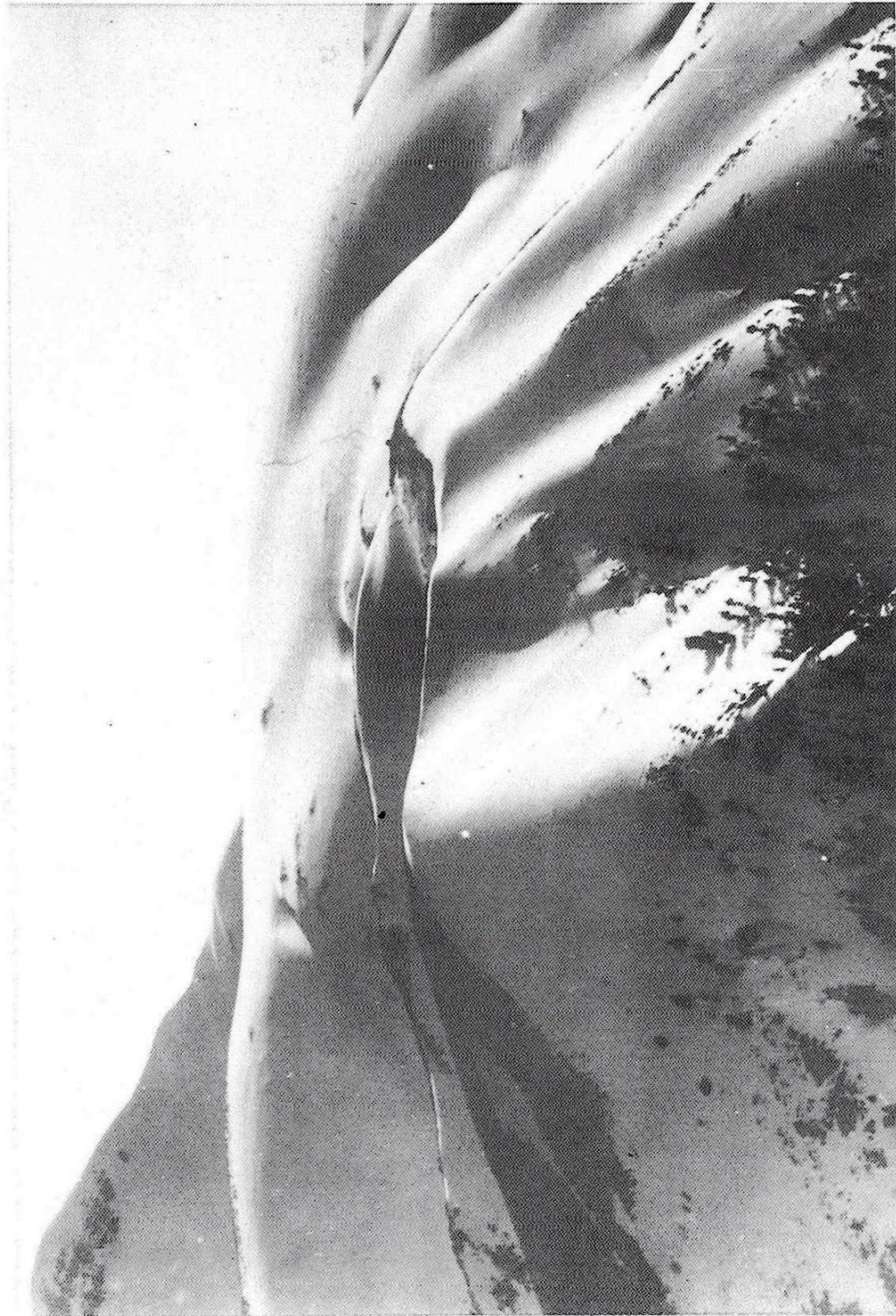


Foto 13: Il Kurvelesh nell'inverno 1940-41

Picture 13: The Kurvelesh in the winter of 1940-41.

The Greek Campaign

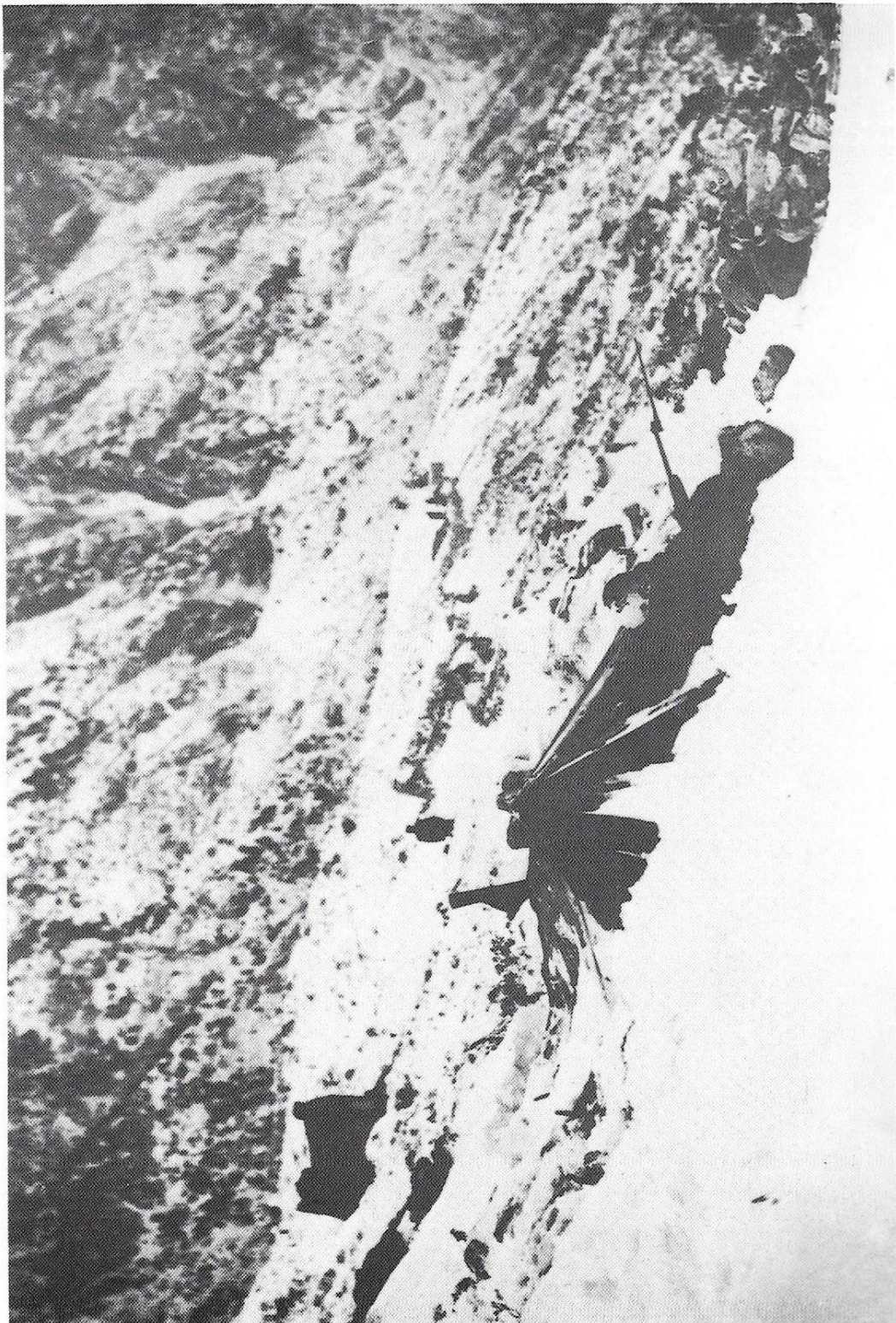


Foto 14: Attendamenti al passo Logorà

Picture 14: Tents in the Logorà pass.

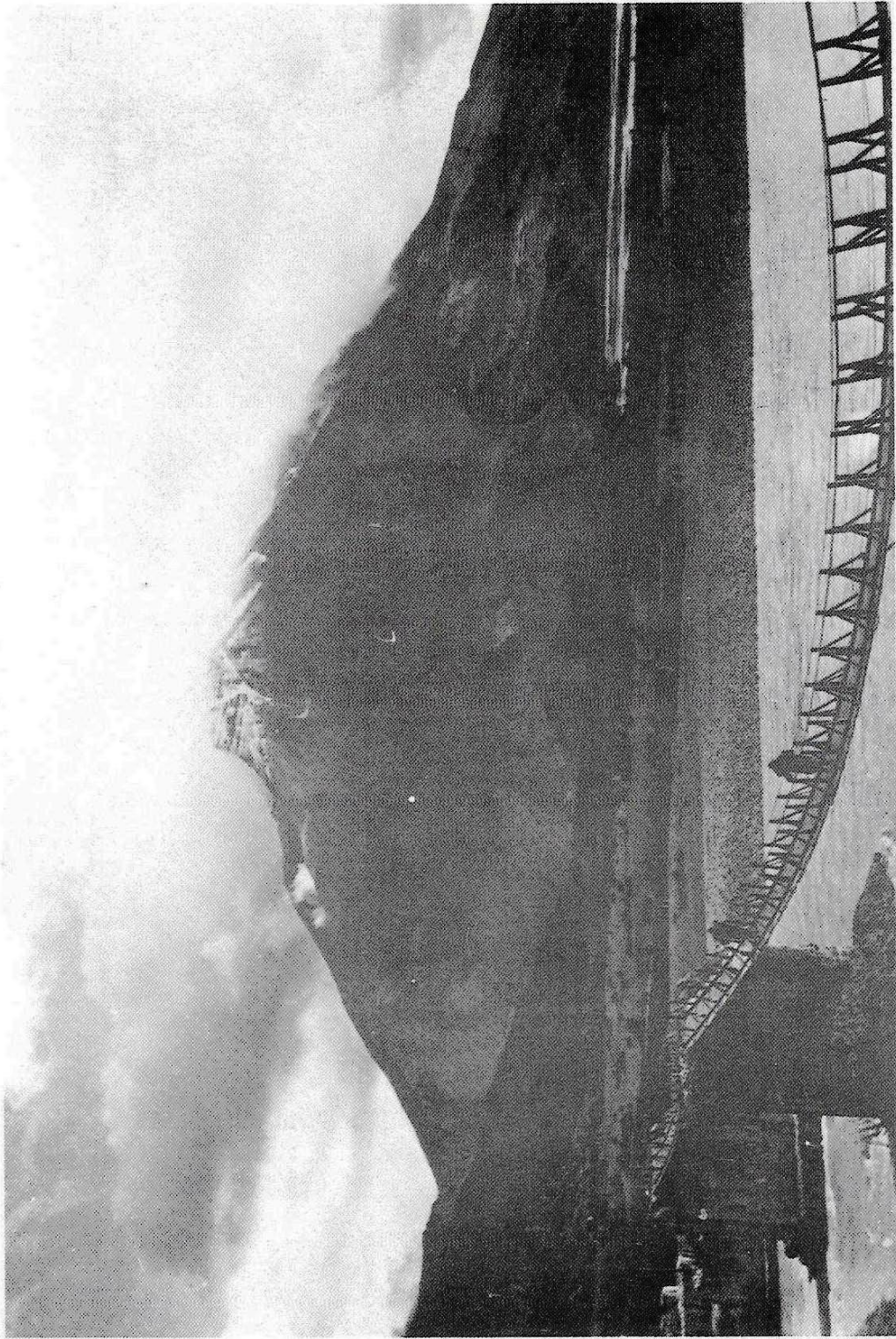


Foto 15: Passarella sul fiume Vojussa nei pressi di Tepeleni

Picture 15: Crossing the river Vojussa near Tepeleni.

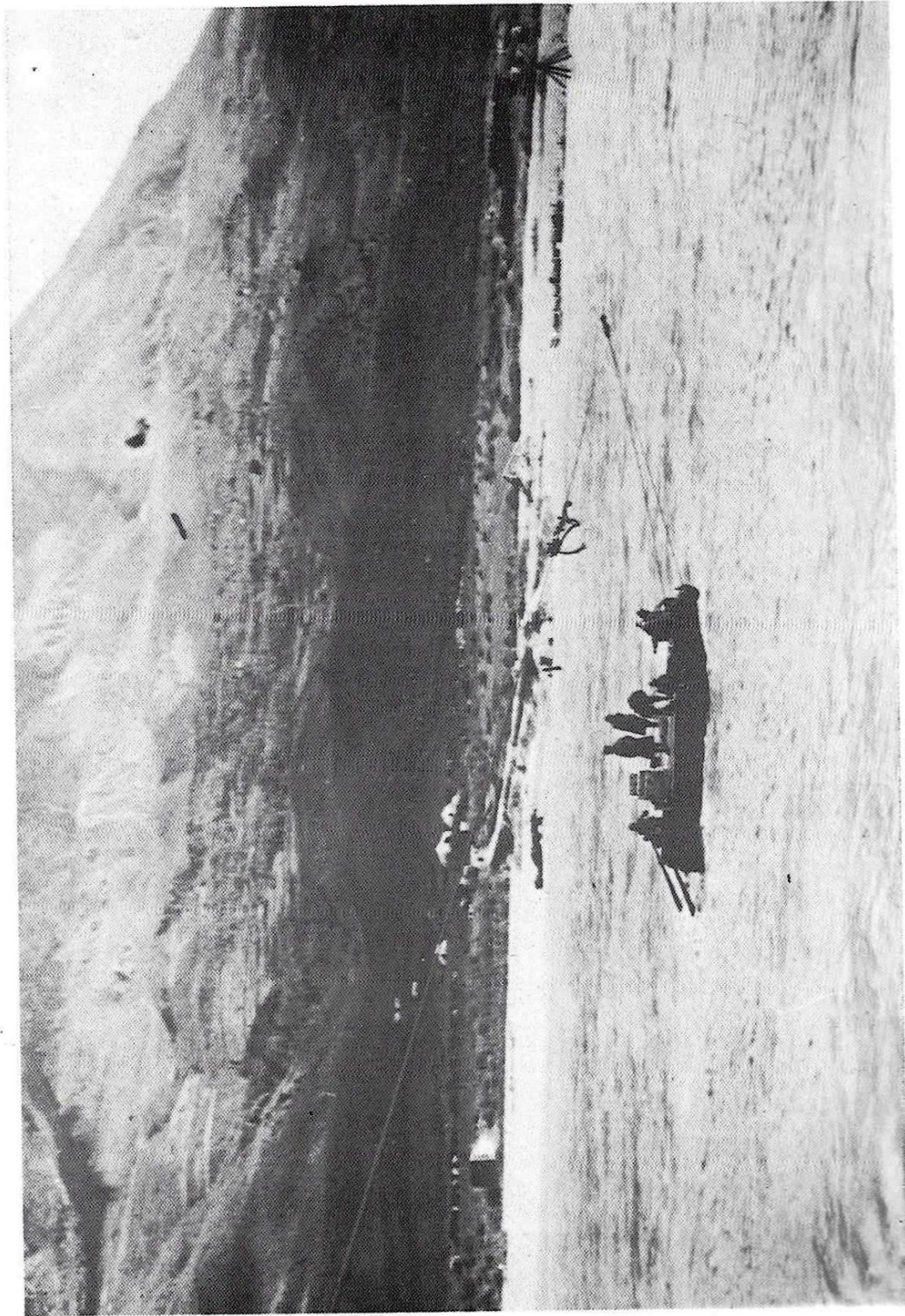


Foto 16: Portiera sulla Vojussa nei pressi Tepeleni

Picture 16: Porters on Vojussa near Tepeleni.

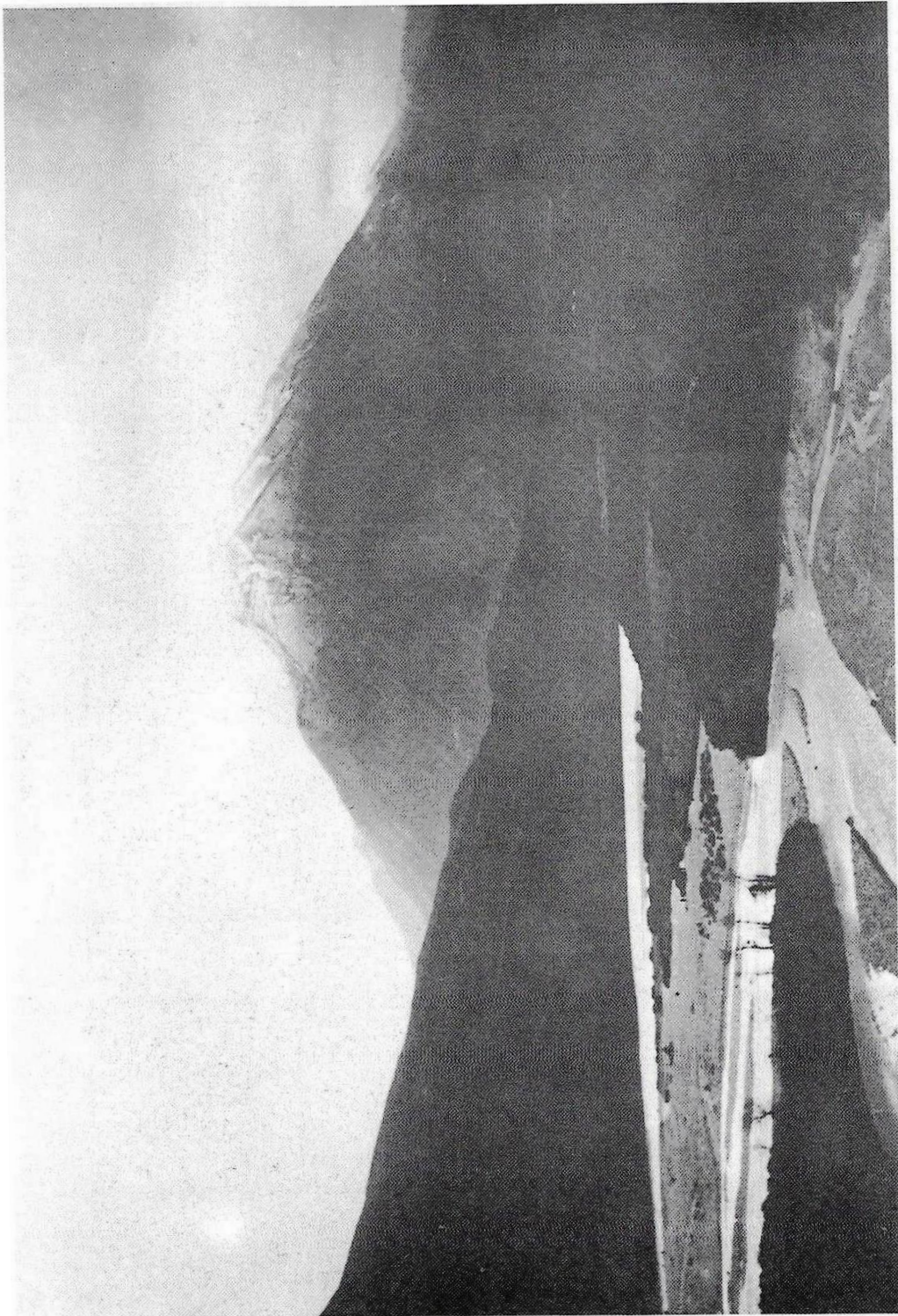


Foto 17: Monte Golico visto dalla valle Voijussa

Picture 17: Monte Golico overlooking Voijussa valley.

The Greek Campaign



Foto 18: Mussolini all'osservatorio della 9ª armata

Picture 18: Mussolini observatory of the 9th Army.

The Greek Campaign

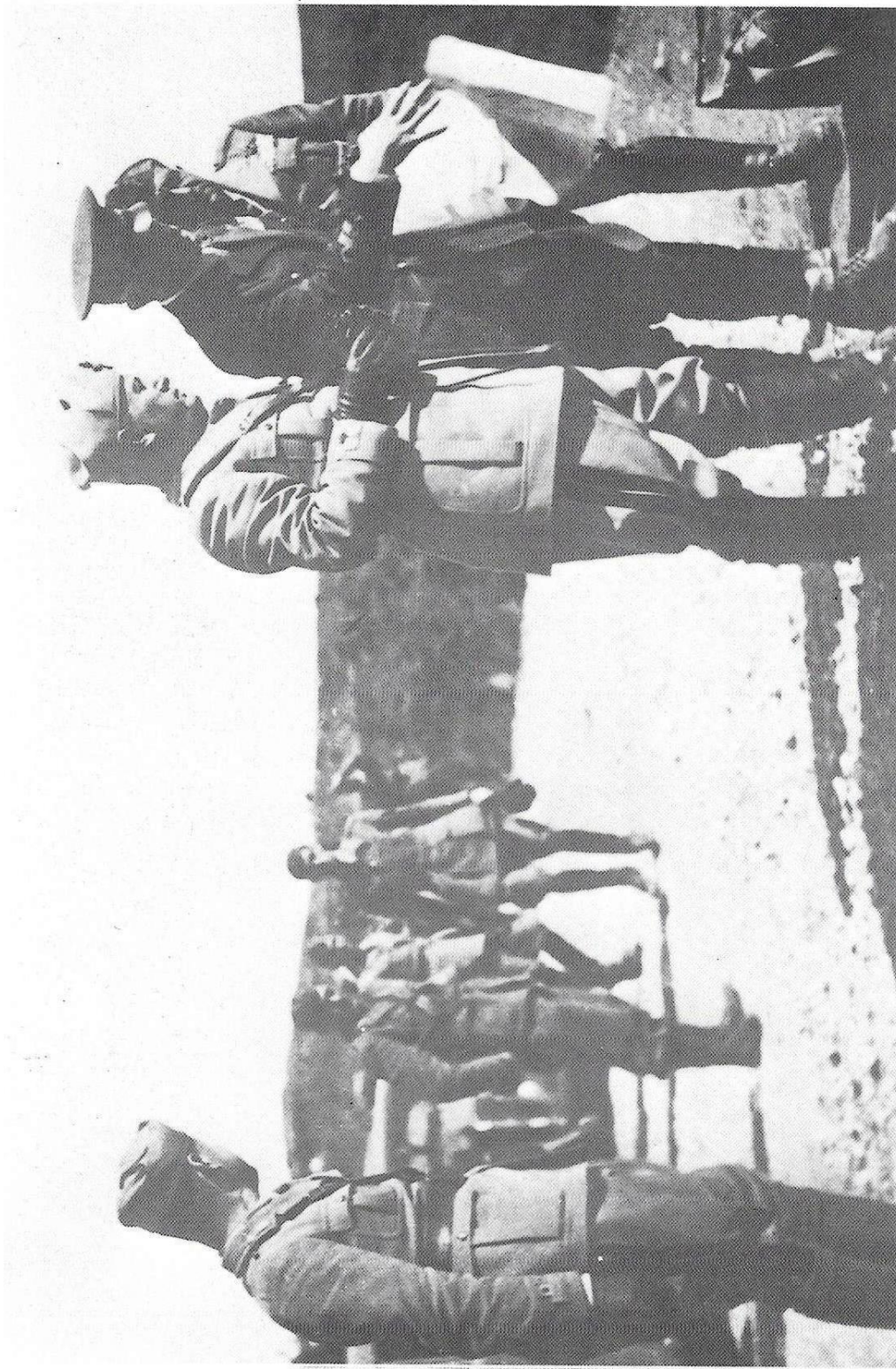


Foto 19: Mussolini con il Gen. Cavallero e Priolo

Picture 19: Mussolini with Gen. Cavallero and Gen. Priolo.

The Greek Campaign



Foto 20: Mussolini fra i soldati della 9ª armata

Picture 20: Mussolini among the soldiers of the 9th Army.

The Greek Campaign



Foto 21: Mussolini con il Gen. Gambara all'osservatorio dell'VIII corpo d'armata

Picture 21: Mussolini with Gen. Gambara observatory VIII Corps.

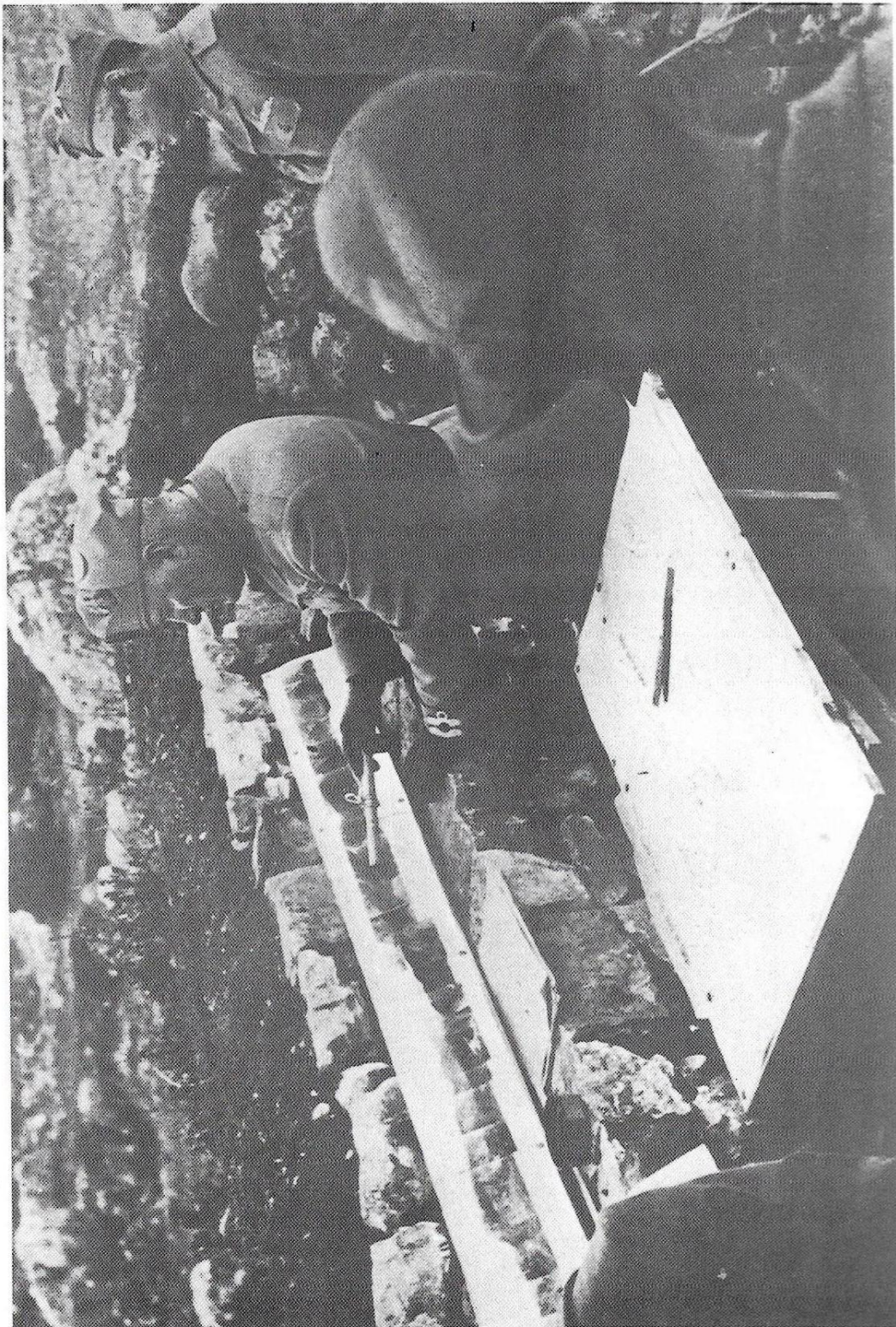


Foto 22: Mussolini all'osservatorio del Corpo d'Armata speciale (Messe)

Picture 22: Mussolini at the observatory Corps Special (Messe).

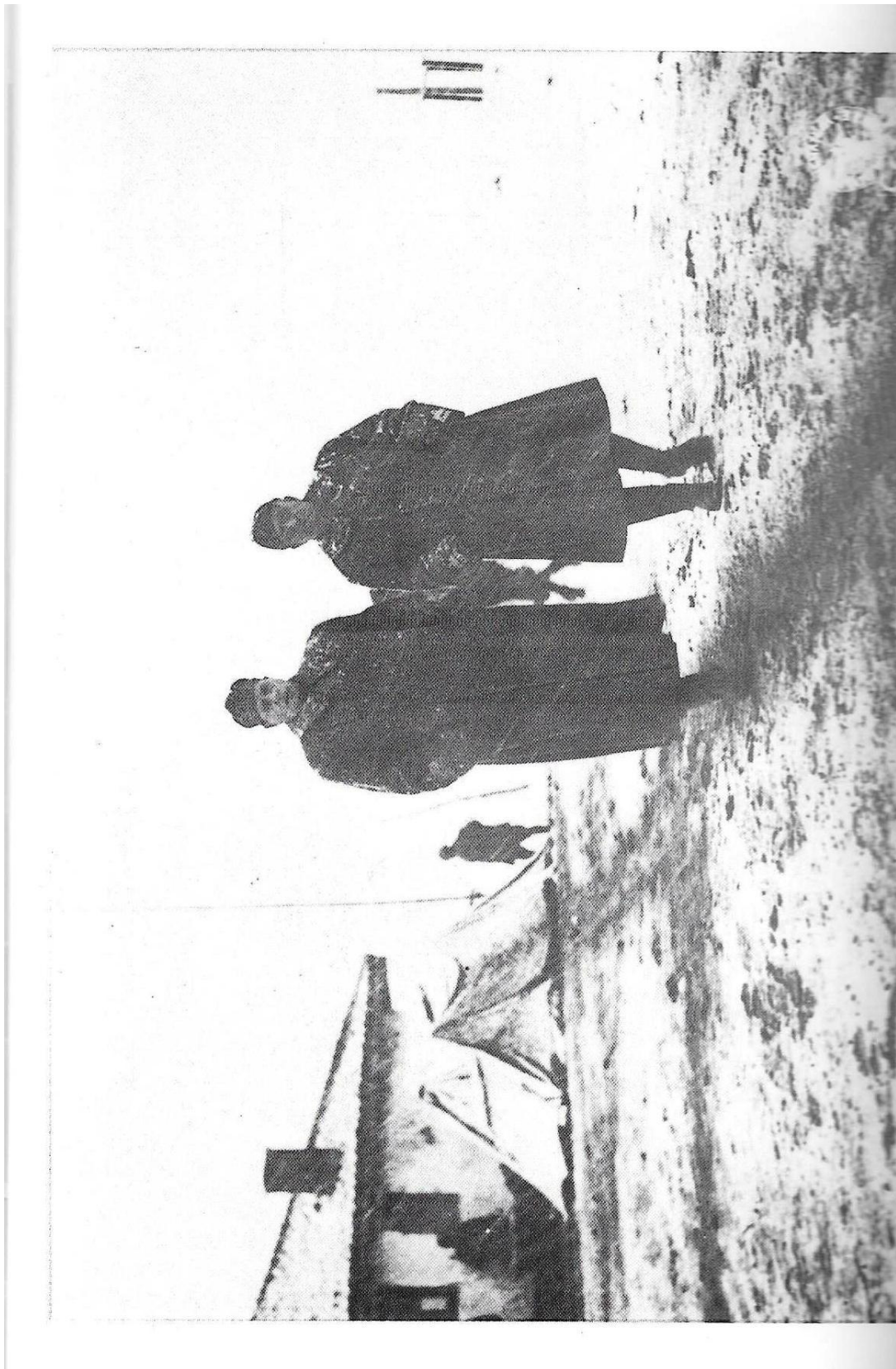
The Greek Campaign



Foto 23: Il Gen. Cavallero con il Ten. Col. Fornara, suo Capo Ufficio Operazioni

Picture 23: General Cavallero with Leut. Col. Fornara, his Corp Operations Officer.

The Greek Campaign



Picture 24: The General Cavallero and Pirzio Biroli visiting the Commando of the DF "Arezzo".

The Greek Campaign

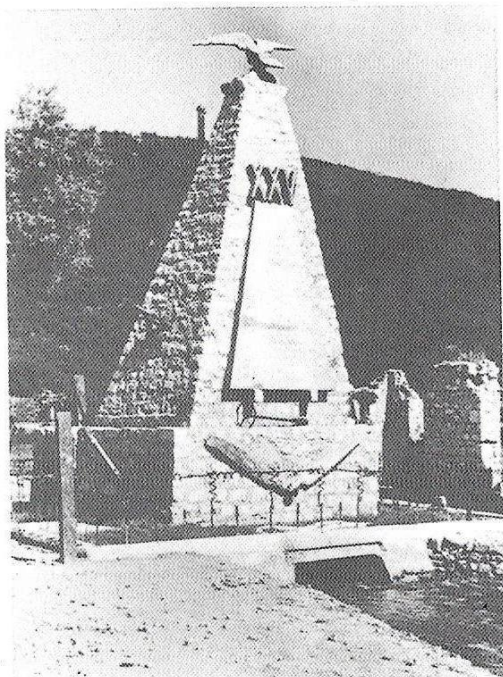


Foto 25: Il monumento del XXV corpo a Tepeleni



Foto 26: Immagine della guerra

Picture 25: The XXV Corp Monument of Tepeleni.

Picture 26: Image of war.